

THE RELIGION AND ETHICS OF TOLSTOY

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO



3 1822 02661 0667

nia
l

BY A.H. CRAUFURD

LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA
SAN DIEGO



3 1822 02661 0667

Date Due

JUN 3 0 1999

PG
3415
R 4
C 7
XX



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

THE RELIGION AND ETHICS OF
TOLSTOY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE RELIGION OF H. G. WELLS AND OTHER ESSAYS

Cr. 8vo, cloth. 3s. 6d. net

CONTENTS.—The Religion of H. G. Wells—The Alleged Indifference of Laymen to Religion—Christ's Remedy for Fear: A Defence of the Higher Anthropomorphism in Religion—The Plenteous Harvest and the Scarcity of True Labourers—Some Thoughts on *The Scarlet Letter*.

"While—as it seems to us—it does justice to Mr Wells, it affords also a powerful and thoroughly modern defence of a rational Christianity."—*Inquirer*.

"An earnest and ingenious effort to discover how far the views of the novelist approximate to those of the Christian philosopher . . . As intellectual exercises, the book's whole contents will appeal to thinking men and women."—*Globe*.

"His examination of Mr H. G. Wells's *First and Last Things* is an excellent piece of critical exposition, and discovers the weak points of that interesting, if somewhat impetuous, "confession of faith," particularly in regard to Mr Wells's estimate of Jesus."—*Literary World*.

"The analysis is well done . . . His criticism, too, is acute and cogent."—*Christian Commonwealth*.

"Extremely readable and full of the widest human interest."—*Manchester City News*.

LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN.

THE RELIGION AND ETHICS OF TOLSTOY

BY THE
REV. ALEXANDER H. CRAUFURD, M.A.,

(Formerly Exhibitioner of Oriel College, Oxford)

AUTHOR OF "RECOLLECTIONS OF JAMES MARTINEAU," "THE RELIGION OF
H. G. WELLS, AND OTHER ESSAYS," ETC.



T. FISHER UNWIN
LONDON : ADELPHI TERRACE
LEIPSIC : INSELSTRASSE 20

1912

[*All Rights Reserved*]

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	ix
I. THE RELIGION AND ETHICS OF TOLSTOY .	17
II. THE PERSONALITY OF GOD	155
III. TOLSTOY'S MELANCHOLY AND HOPEFULNESS	169
IV. TOLSTOY'S VIEWS ON ART	177

INTRODUCTION

COUNT LEO NIKOLAEVITCH TOLSTOY was born in the early autumn of the year 1828 at Yasnaya Polyana, near Moscow. His parents both belonged to the Russian aristocracy. His father had been in the army. His childhood was not altogether happy on account of his extremely sensitive and passionate temperament. He was an idealist even in his youth. Even then he had a great longing for God, and he appears even then to have studied some of the greatest problems of life and thought. At a very early age he was a student at the university of Kazan, and afterwards he was a student in the university of St Petersburg. In the year 1851 he was for a time an officer in the Caucasus, and he was greatly delighted with the mountains of that district, and was profoundly and permanently impressed by them. He remained in the Caucasus till the year 1853. In the

Introduction

year 1854 we find him in active service as an officer in the Crimean War. During that war he distinguished himself by his great bravery, and he saw much of the horrors of war. They left on his mind an abiding sense of the utter hatefulness of war. In the hospitals he saw scenes which pierced and sickened his heart, so that he became a fervent and persistent advocate of peace.

At the close of the Crimean War, Tolstoy left the army and took to society and literature, and he also travelled a good deal. In the early autumn of 1862 he was married. And then for many years he lived at his country house, Yasnaya Polyana, and spent his time in looking after his estates and in writing. In the year 1878 he experienced what is called his conversion; and from that time till his death his main interest was in religion. Before his conversion he suffered agonies of spiritual unrest, and he very often thought of committing suicide. Neither science nor philosophy could satisfy him. His condition at this stage reminds one of that of St Augustine during a similar time of crisis. Both these great souls thirsted for God,

Introduction

and could not be satisfied with anything else. Tolstoy does not really tell us exactly *how* he eventually found peace. So far as he indicates the process at all, it seems to have consisted in a sudden conviction that Christ's teaching, contained in the Sermon on the Mount, was to be applied *literally* to every phase of human life. Henceforth he lived only for the propagation of the Gospel which he had discovered. He cast himself adrift from the churches, and thought out a religion for himself. He came to the conclusion that simple people, like the peasants, really understood the philosophy of life far better than the rich and the cultivated. As Emerson would have said concerning them, these intellectual babes were "wiser than they knew."

(During the later years of his life Tolstoy's religion was a kind of mixture of Socialism, asceticism, and mysticism, with a slight tincture of stoicism.) He wished to have no property of his own; but he was obliged to be content with making over his possessions to his family. Personally he lived a life of extreme simplicity, and he abhorred

Introduction

all luxuries. He even condemned the habit of smoking.

His novels, as everyone knows, acquired a world-wide fame, and they helped to induce a considerable number of people to study his ethical and religious books. He has exercised more influence over the world in general than any other Russian has ever exercised. He has directed men's attention to some extremely important, though generally neglected, aspects of the religion of Christ. He has transported that religion from the academies of the learned and the cathedrals of formal worship into the market-places of ordinary life. He has constantly kept in his mind the declaration of the Bible, that the common people heard Christ gladly.

This great teacher has given us an *ideal towards which* all true followers of Jesus ought to work. He has woken us up from the deep slumber of self-satisfied and Pharisaical conventionalism. He has *forced* many of us to realize the truth that ordinary ecclesiasticism is not the Christianity of Christ. From the vain wrangling of dogmatic

Introduction

theologians he has led us back to the fountain-head of practical goodness. He has made us think more of the Sermon on the Mount and less of the Athanasian creed.

The object of this little book is to discuss the religion of Tolstoy in a spirit of sympathy combined with careful criticism, and also to compare his ethical and spiritual ideas with those of other well-known thinkers.

The death of this famous Russian occurred so very recently—only a few weeks ago—that it is scarcely necessary to give readers an account of it. His wandering from his home appears to have been the culmination of a long-cherished tendency to seek a sort of monastic seclusion in which he might meditate over the lessons of his life, and prepare his soul for its migration to an unearthly condition beyond time and space.

1st March 1911.

THE RELIGION AND ETHICS OF
TOLSTOY

The Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

I

COUNT LEO TOLSTOY'S extraordinary genius as an artist and a novelist has perhaps tended to hide from us his great merits and value as a *religious* teacher. Yet many of the very same qualities which made him such a vivid and brilliant writer of fiction also made him a great ethical and spiritual guide. There was a real and vital connection between his art and his religion. The latter was not in any sense an abnegation of the former. His intense sincerity, his originality, and his amazing knowledge of the secret recesses of the souls of men and women, together with his exceedingly picturesque and imaginative style, are just as valuable in religion as in art or general

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

literature. It is evident enough that in many ways he belonged to the order of the true prophets. His intense spiritual loneliness and his haunting sense of the horrors of death show his abiding kinship with spirits like those of the old Hebrew moralists, and of Dante, Pascal, and Cardinal Newman. His greatest novels were a kind of prelude to his conversion. Like St Paul, when his eyes were opened to discern the realities of life and death, he conferred not with flesh and blood, but retired to the bleak steppes of Russia, even as the Apostle to the Gentiles retired to the deserts of Arabia. His religion was the outcome of personal experience and intuition, and not of any sort of tradition; nor did he approach God through an avenue of books.

Hence came the universality of his message transcending all local limits. Hence also a certain wildness, as of the desert. He came to men, not as an accredited agent of the churches, but as a kind of stormy and revolutionary Elijah, as a conqueror from the wastes of Edom with garments rolled in blood. A profound melancholy, almost like that of Dante, characterized his teaching as

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

to the world and its courses. He had fought with innumerable devastating spiritual beasts or monsters in his solitary vigils. A kind of habitual gloom darkened all his deepest life.

Tolstoy had also a profound, passionate, and thoroughly unsectarian human tenderness which attracted men far more than the bitter scornfulness of a Dante or a Carlyle. In him was incarnate the noble soul of Bunyan's Greatheart. As his pitying spirit looked forth on the welter and chaos of ordinary human life, especially as he viewed the dumb, patient, and pathetic endurance of Russian peasants and soldiers, this most Christian heart for ever cried, "I have compassion upon the multitude." Tolstoy was a veritable apostle to the heavy-laden, the sorrowful, the down-trodden, and the oppressed. In this respect he greatly resembled Theodore Parker, one of the noblest of all souls in modern times, whose large heart was moved to deepest sympathy by the woes of the slaves and outcasts of the world, and of whom the best description ever given was that which declared that he always seemed to be holding someone by the hand. Gazing into the warm recesses

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

of Tolstoy's capacious and hospitable heart, one feels that the best description of his spiritual self was given us in the touching and sublime words of an old Hebrew prophet: "A man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

Tolstoy's keen-sighted, invincible, and loving ethical hopefulness is one of our best preservatives against the scornful and depressing pessimism and violence of Carlyle. The hopefulness of the great Russian, unlike the insecure optimism of Emerson, was based on a prolonged and careful study of all the facts of human nature and human life. It never sought to "heal our hurt slightly," and to cry peace where there was no peace. This intrepid warrior spirit had been down into the lowest depths of the universe, and had found God there also, and had seen death and hell swallowed up in the final victory of reason and love. To a sympathetic soul living in Russia this glorious moral confidence must have been specially difficult. Even the most faint and shadowy outlines of a coming kingdom of God were scarcely perceptible

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

there. Noble minds there "looked for judgment, and behold oppression, for righteousness, and behold a cry!" Tolstoy knew well some of the very worst hells on earth, the Russian prisons with all their infernal cruelties. Yet his faith remained invincible, as Browning's did when he gazed on the dead bodies of men who had committed suicide. He certainly "came out strong" in the most unfavourable circumstances.

Even the exaggerations of this writer are suggestive and stimulating. His religion was intensely spiritual, like that of the best German mystical writers. His whole soul was ever haunted by that most significant and pregnant of all the sayings of Jesus: "The Kingdom of God is within you."

From the churches Tolstoy expected little or nothing of any great value. His estimate of them is despairing, though in great measure just. He thought that they had hidden rather than revealed the true teaching of Jesus Christ. They must die, in order that genuine Christianity may live. He wrote thus of them: "The Church carried the light of the teaching of Jesus for eighteen

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

centuries, and, wishing to hide it in her robes, was herself burnt in the flame. The world abandoned her and her institutions for the sake of those very principles of Christianity which she herself had unwillingly preserved. Those principles live to-day without her. This is a fact which it is now impossible to conceal. . . . All churches, whether Catholic, Greek, or Protestant, are like sentinels carefully guarding a prisoner who escaped long ago, and who is now a free man attacking them." He also said that the churches have been to mankind as a helmsman "who did not steer at all." And he goes on to say that this would not signify, except for the fact that men now float on without any rudder or any helmsman, not knowing whither they go.

This depreciating estimate of the churches seems true to a very great extent. They appear to have lost touch with the realities of our present human life. Probably very few men with vivid natures and bold intellects care much, in these days, for *ordinary* ecclesiastical teaching. Men are now chiefly guided by their instincts to some slight extent enlightened by science and

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

philosophy. Conventional preaching appeals mostly to women and womanish men.

Before discussing some of Tolstoy's fundamental ideas, it may be well to compare them with those of other prominent teachers. His affinity to Rousseau is so obvious that we need not point it out.

In the first place we find the views of the Russian moralist in complete and violent antagonism with those of that half-mad genius, Nietzsche. Tolstoy in some respects exaggerated Christianity, whereas Nietzsche scorned and abhorred it. The one guide preached humility, self-sacrifice or self-effacement, and considerate tenderness for the weak; the other preached a gospel of pride, hardness, self-assertion, and tyranny over all the weaker portions of humanity. The German was perfectly willing to devour men, if by so doing he could enlarge his own personality, whilst the Russian ever desired to "give his life a ransom for many." Nietzsche wished to trample upon the weak, just as Cotter Morison wished to exterminate the wicked. Neither of these harsh spirits believed in the redeeming efficacy of pity and love. Perhaps some very slight germs of Nietzsche's aristocratic self-

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

assertiveness may be found in Aristotle's conception of the " high-minded " man in his *Ethics*.

To most thinkers it is plain enough that the religion of Christ and of his follower, Tolstoy, is far wiser and more salutary, as well as far nobler, than that of Nietzsche. But this wiser, more human, and more attractive religion must not be misunderstood or exaggerated, as it often has been in former ages. The duty of self-sacrifice must not be so interpreted as to preclude the best self-development. Goethe really has *something* to teach us which we could scarcely learn from Tolstoy. In many cases the very best service which a man can render to his race is to develop himself adequately. In order to serve our fellow-men greatly, we must sometimes decline to serve them in a slight or trivial way. If one man is to die for the people, it must be in the deepest sense *expedient* that he should so die. Self-sacrifice without an adequate object is neither admirable nor desirable. To lay down one's life for a friend is noble; but to risk the loss of a valuable human life, in order to save one's neighbour's hat or umbrella, or even his cat or his lap-dog, is decidedly rather foolish.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

To a certain extent it is true that the higher and greater natures ought often to resist the demands of the lower. Concentration of aim in life is not selfishness, though it is often confused with it. Those who have real work to do in the world must often refuse to waste their time over trivial matters, such as the tea-parties of women like a "Rosamond Vincy" in *Middlemarch*.

One must, I think, also concede to writers like Nietzsche that it is not desirable to *encourage* the physically and mentally unfit to produce offspring, though of course it is impossible in many cases to prevent them from doing so.

We must also own that modern democracy is often dangerous when demanding for the ignorant and stupid an *equal* share with the wise in determining legislation. An ideal form of government would be one in which power was in proportion to intelligence. Some modern democracies seem very foolishly to interpret literally St Paul's bitterly ironical advice. "Set those to judge who are least esteemed in the Church." It is quite right that the greater natures should exercise real influence over the lower. It is not true that all

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

men either are or can be really equal. John Stuart Mill thought that it would be a real disadvantage to a nation to be given a thoroughly democratic form of government before it was adequately prepared for it. The *Vox populi* is by no means always a veritable *Vox Dei*. There is no tyranny so penetrating and injurious as that of an untrained mob. The wise have a right to treat the ignorant as children to a great extent, but they ought to endeavour to educate them gradually, and not merely to suppress or trample upon them, as Nietzsche would do.

In his book called *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche plainly declared that the higher or greater natures have *no* duties towards the lower, and that they may treat them just as they please. That assuredly is an intolerable doctrine. Supposing that the inhabitants of some other planet—say Mars—are greatly superior to us, and supposing that free intercourse were established between them and us, would Nietzsche own that these superior and more developed beings had a perfect right to abuse and torture *him*, if, by so doing, they could promote their own growth? Would

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

he say that God has a perfect right to torture His creatures for ever, in order to enhance His own happiness or welfare? Is the saying that *Noblesse oblige* an entirely false one? Nietzsche's doctrine on this subject seems to be a kind of Calvinism which has discarded the last lingering elements of Christianity. And it is not really in harmony with modern evolutionary ethics, which trace human morality to its primal source in sympathy. It does not seem in the least degree likely that savage selfishness will serve the world better than thoughtful and discriminating benevolence. As James Hinton clearly perceived, the wants and weaknesses of others often give a real significance, interest, and value to the dormant and neglected gifts of higher and stronger natures. We can often do for the sake of others what we could not do from self-regard. Whatever impoverishes our *social* nature, or narrows the range of its activities, seems necessarily to impoverish our best ethical and spiritual life. In a very real and lasting sense "It is more *blessed* to give than to receive." The best greatness often comes to us through service to others.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

It appears to be evident enough that the ethical doctrine of Nietzsche is of the sort tersely described as "penny wise, but pound foolish." He does not realize the profound truth that in the moral and spiritual world lavish giving is often the indispensable condition of still more lavish receiving, that to keep our life is often equivalent to losing it, and that to lose it is often equivalent to the best keeping and enlarging of it. Benefits stolen or violently taken from others are far less precious and valuable than benefits freely given to us. No human life can thrive without deep and varied sympathy. In discarding self-sacrificing sympathy Nietzsche would wither heroism down to its very roots; for heroism finds its chief sphere for work amongst the unhappy, the unfortunate, the suffering, the struggling, the oppressed, and the weak. In bearing the burdens of others it finds its own noblest crown of rejoicing. Then only is its love made perfect; then only does it shine with a truly god-like splendour. In the end, selfishness and unsympathizing tyranny would assuredly bring their own punishment to any spirit which retained any lingering traces of the

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

highest human qualities. For such a spirit the glory of life would then have departed. There would be almost nothing left to redeem it from the commonplace. In the realms of entirely self-seeking rapacity heroism and love could no longer exist. And, in losing all the finer kinds of heroism, human life would cease to be irradiated by the sublime. A kind of depressing blight would brood over man's existence. The son of man would no longer be a son of God. Having devoured or banished or imprisoned all those weaker brethren who afford a sphere for the development or exercise of the noblest qualities of the strong, the vigorous and selfish would find that they had inflicted an irreparable injury on *themselves*. Their fate would to some extent resemble that of him who wished that everything that he touched should be turned into gold. Their riches would be of very little value to their owners. Resting amongst the well-stored barns of unscrupulous and violent greediness, the half-stifled inner being of the rich and selfish man might perhaps be eventually startled by the inherent irony of the universe crying, "*Vanitas Vanitatum*," or by the voice of the divine wisdom

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

saying to him, in a sterner sense than that which its words conveyed in the days of old: "Thou fool, thy soul *has already* been required of thee. What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? He that keepeth his life shall lose it." Only Love never faileth.

The deepest life of the soul cannot truly exist without the heroic and the morally sublime, and these would be effectually banished from a world moulded after Nietzsche's plans.

Turning now to a thinker diametrically opposed to Nietzsche, we find in James Hinton a spirit very much akin to that of Tolstoy, as we may also find one in Thomas à Kempis. In their vehement demand for absolute disinterestedness and complete self-effacement these three most Christian souls had much in common. Modern altruism bids us say to collective humanity what the author of the *Imitation of Christ* said to Jesus: "*Amem te plus quam me. Ne amem me nisi propter te.*" It must, I think, be owned that both Tolstoy and Hinton used exaggerated language about self-sacrifice. They demanded that men should not

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

love themselves at all. They remind us of "Dinah Morris," the preacher in *Adam Bede*, of whom it was said that, if she had only loved her neighbours as herself, she would have thought that they might very well manage with empty stomachs.

Both Tolstoy and Hinton seemed to have a quarrel with personality as such. The former wished to starve it, whilst the latter wished to destroy it. The Russian moralist sometimes owned that in this life we cannot and ought not to get rid of our individuality; but he wished to thrust it entirely into the background, and he sometimes talked of renouncing it as a positive duty. He did not realize the truth that it is unwise to starve or neglect our animal individuality.

Asceticism, in its desire to promote spirituality, is very apt to neglect the care of that which is the basis of all fruitful human life and activity. It forgets that bodily health is generally an indispensable condition of the best and most prolonged mental work. The master must not starve his workmen. Hinton's quarrel with consciousness, and to a less extent Tolstoy's disdain of corporeal pleasure, remind one of the far-famed revolt of the

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

members against the belly. In both cases alike, that which might seem useless and idle is yet the necessary condition of real activity. And it is manifest that even self-sacrifice implies or postulates individuality. In order to sacrifice the self, there must be a self—a self perpetually renewed, like the bush that burned but was not consumed. There is no real or essential connection between the most developed self-consciousness and selfishness. In being made flesh, the “ Word ” does not lose its power, but has it greatly increased. Mere abstractions have little influence over the majority of mankind. As Cardinal Newman declared in one of his sermons, personal influence is the best means for propagating truth. Broad and genial humanity is needed in order to attract wandering and erring hearts. Fervent natures often feel towards merely abstract ideas either total indifference or else a kind of shrinking and dread, like that which the Israelites felt towards the awful Jehovah when they cried to Moses, “ Speak thou with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.”

Tolstoy's genuine affinity with Browning is very

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

manifest. Both these great souls were radically hopeful, though the temperament of the poet was naturally far more cheerful than that of the Russian novelist. Both these teachers regarded love as the regnant principle and the goal of the universe. The spirit that pervades the poem called "Paracelsus" also pervades all the writings of Tolstoy, and also gives us an adequate refutation of the doctrines of Nietzsche. Both the novelist and the poet were profound psychologists, but the psychology of Browning was far less influenced by asceticism. The gloom of Russia never invaded the soul of the Englishman. Browning saw far more clearly than Tolstoy the soul of goodness in things evil. He often seemed actually to *see* what the Russian only dimly hoped for. His mind was far more free from austerity. His spiritual development had been far less stormy; and so he did not hate sin in that vehement and intolerant way in which those hate it who have been oppressed and enslaved by it in former years. He never felt the intense reaction and recoil from sensuality which St Augustine and Tolstoy felt so bitterly. He did not "hate even the garments

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

spotted by the flesh," as Jude would have us hate them. He did not worship virginity or total sexual abstinence. He saw some faint gleams of incipient spirituality even in some forms of passionate corporeal human affection. In man's animal nature his keen, unprejudiced, and calmer vision descried the promise and the potency of the life heroic. He perceived the extremely subtle way in which good and evil are blended in our wonderfully complex being. To Tolstoy man's animal nature was a mere city of destruction to be immediately and altogether abandoned. To the English poet that same city was the soil in which there should eventually bloom some of the fairest flowers of the garden of the Lord. Apparently the Russian ascetic, wishing to extirpate animality entirely, had no vision of the ultimate transfiguration of matter by mind. He never learnt that its old grossness is neither an original nor a permanent quality of matter itself. Hence, perhaps, arose his vehement repudiation of anything approaching to the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. In his view of the essential nature of matter Tolstoy had more affinity with Plato

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

and the Neo-Platonists than with Modern Science.

It is rather remarkable that in his book called *On Life*, which contains what we may call his *philosophy* of religion, Tolstoy did not demand complete sexual abstinence from all men. Probably his asceticism had not yet reached that full and startling development which confronts us in his *Kreutzer Sonata*. The world in general is not at all likely to accept a theory which would bring human existence to a final end in this planet. It is very improbable that God wishes the human race to commit suicide. Such exaggerated teaching is much to be deplored, because it tends to throw discredit on the sanity of the preacher, and so to neutralize much of his wisest advice. On this, as on some other subjects, we feel inclined to say to the stern ascetic, "Be not righteous over-much; why shouldest thou destroy thyself?"

In some ways Tolstoy had much in common with the American poet, Walt Whitman, though in other ways he was in unrelenting opposition to the views of that erratic thinker. Whitman's glorification of the body would have been most revolt-

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

ing to Tolstoy; but his distinct preference for what he called natural persons, his liking to associate with peasants, artisans, and simple folk in general, together with his devotion to life in the open air, would have been quite congenial to the Russian moralist who so detested all the artificialities of conventional life. As Professor J. R. Seeley truly said, "Conventionalism is in every department the opposite of religion." We can learn more of fundamental human nature and of its wants and tendencies by intimate converse with soldiers, sailors, labourers, and shepherds than we could learn at the tea-parties of ordinary civilized society.

With regard to the eternal and waylaying problem of pain and suffering, the teaching of Tolstoy is suggestive, though of course not entirely satisfactory. In his profound and brooding melancholy he rather exaggerated the incurable misery of all developed human life, whilst perhaps rather unduly under-estimating the suffering of children and animals. In his book on *Life* he says, "With the animal and the child pain is clearly defined and very slight, never attaining to the degree of tor-

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

ment which it reaches in a being endowed with reasonable consciousness." He rightly thought that some degree of pain is necessary for the preservation of life. He declares that "without the faculty of feeling pain, children and young people would destroy their bodies; grown men would never know the errors of other men of the past or present, nor, which is of most importance, their own errors. They would not know what they ought to do in this life; their activity would have no rational aim; they would never be able to reconcile themselves to the idea of carnal death; they could not possess love." In this last sentence Tolstoy reminds us of the noble words of James Martineau who said that "A world without a contingency or an agony could have no hero and no saint, and could enable no son of man to discover that he is a son of God." The great Russian clearly recognized this truth when he said "You speak of the sufferings of others; but it is this—it is the lessening, the solacing of these sufferings, which forms the essence of the rational life of men." He goes on to say, "How, then, can the material of his work be a suffering to the workman? It is as if the

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

labourer said that an untilled field was a suffering to him. An untilled field can be a suffering only to him who wishes to see it tilled, but does not regard the tilling of it as the task of his life."

Perhaps this argument ignores the truth that a man may be unable to till a field, though greatly *wishing* to till it. Perhaps the keenest of all our sufferings come to us when we are forced to look on the sufferings of those whom we love, whilst we are utterly powerless to assuage them. But, on the whole, Tolstoy's teaching on this subject is wise. Perhaps we may find some slight approximation to a solution of the eternal problem of suffering by realizing the truth that, in a finite being, adequate sympathy can be produced only by personal pain. The young and inexperienced, and those whose life has been almost uniformly happy, are generally very deficient in sympathy with others. Only by first going down into hell can we become genuine Sons of Consolation, and thus be "made partakers of the divine nature," which is Love.

Yet, after all, the great problem cannot really

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

be solved for us in this life. There seems to be far more suffering than is necessary. The sufferings of the lower animals are to a great extent inexplicable, and the hideous and prolonged cruelties of men often make faith in a benevolent God almost impossible. Nor do human sufferings *always* produce good results morally, so far as we can see. As the late W. R. Greg observed, there are chastisements that do not chasten and trials that do not purify. And, as John Stuart Mill observed, Nature, in its dealings with us, often makes no fine or discriminating moral distinctions, and often seems to punish or destroy men for their *good* deeds. As Emerson thought, prudence would often appear to bid us be afraid of our *great* qualities, and thank God for our meaner qualities. Spiritual nobleness is usually crowned with thorns, and often leads its possessor to Calvary. Without the hope of a future life it is impossible to justify rationally the creed of optimism or even of true and abiding meliorism.

As regards death, which so haunted his soul, Tolstoy showed real insight when he declared that men often fear it chiefly because they have never

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

yet found true and adequate life. As John Stuart Mill wisely remarked, it is hard to die without having ever truly lived. As Robertson of Brighton said, none of the promises of God are fulfilled in this life. The utterly *wasted* faculties of some of the very noblest characters seem to demand a future life with quite *special* eloquence and imperiousness. Over the graves of many grand and heroic failures, over the graves of many glorious spiritual abortions, discerning human pity cries aloud to the far-off Creator with perplexed sorrow and immeasurable suggestiveness. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." God's apparent failures are often far more prophetically suggestive than His successes. The noblest of the sons of God are often the most "sore let and hindered" during their earthly careers. They are *specially* out of harmony with their mundane environment. Unsited for earthly success, they declare plainly that they seek a better country, that is, a heavenly.

Robertson of Brighton would have agreed with

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

Tolstoy's opinion that men fear death chiefly because they have never yet found the true and satisfying life here on earth; for he declared that almost the only solid evidence for immortality is to be found in the eternal life *already* begun in our souls during our present existence. As Plato said, it is the child within us that fears death; and most men never attain genuine spiritual *manhood* during their existence on earth. Our *animal* part naturally dreads death as equivalent to total annihilation, feeling instinctively that the eternal life is not *for it*.

A large part of Tolstoy's practical teaching is too much in advance of our age. It is born out of due season, and cannot be thoroughly carried out in the present state of the world. It is an *ideal* towards which we ought to work. The prophets of God are often rather too long-sighted and impatient. They "behold the land that is very far off." They sometimes ignore the difficulties of weak pilgrims and seek to hurry them unduly on their course. Like James Martineau, they imagine that others are as strong as themselves. They make insufficient allowance for unfavourable cir-

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

cumstances. They almost scorn provisional or imperfect virtues. They despise the day of small things. They forget how very gradually God works in ordinary souls. They do not bear in mind the wise teaching of Bishop Butler, who declared that, whilst men are for precipitating things, God is majestically slow in all His works. They would scarcely agree with Bishop Thirlwall, who thought it rather presumptuous to pray, as we do in our burial service in the Church of England, that God will "shortly accomplish the number of His elect and hasten His Kingdom." In their impatience great souls often do not perceive that "the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation." They do not understand the slow processes by which God touches to fine issues our merely natural faculties, and brings all-embracing charity out of comradeship, and universal love out of local or sectarian patriotism. Patriotism and comradeship are often a kind of schoolmaster to bring ignorant souls to Christ. Profoundly spiritual teachers are inclined to forget that God besets our nature *behind* as well as before, that He is the Alpha as well as the Omega of pilgrim spirits, that

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

He "leads the blind by a way that they know not," that in man's lowliest human instincts God has implanted the seeds of the loftiest religion.

We must not be hasty in pulling up the apparent tares of our nature, lest perchance we should pull up the wheat also.

Tolstoy perhaps ignored the fact that some of his precepts would necessarily be far harder or more difficult to his followers than to himself. Refusing to join in waging war, to pay taxes, or to take oaths, complete non-resistance to evil, and other counsels of perfection were *comparatively* easy to the great Russian novelist, on account of the reverence felt towards him by his own nation; but they would be far more difficult and dangerous to ordinary men for whom the nation in general felt no special reverence or esteem.

Though a great deal of Tolstoy's practical religion and morality is, as I have already said, more suited to be an inspiring ideal than a precise and accurate rule for present life, of course such high ideals are in some ways most valuable. They prevent men from sinking into the torpid self-satisfaction which is a kind of dry-rot of the soul.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

They force men to cry with St Paul, "Not as though we had already attained." And we believe that, to a very great extent, these high ideals will *some day* be realized. We believe that the kingdoms of the world will some day become the Kingdoms of Christ and His Eternal Father.

Coming now to the roots of Tolstoy's philosophy and religion, it appears that we shall find that they are ultimately based on a kind of confident but undeveloped Pragmatism, though he often tried to *strengthen* his system by rather unintelligible and mystical metaphysics. In his case, the man of action still lived and energized in the man of thought. The heart of a philanthropist, in the best sense of the word, still was beating under the hair-shirt of the mystical ascetic. Tolstoy's large, prolonged, and varied knowledge of the world saved him generally to some extent from the futile attempt to base religion on the cobwebs of fragile, transient, and unverified metaphysics. Like a brilliant man of science, the late Clerk Maxwell, the Russian philosopher usually was not content with a cloud of pretentious generalities. Like the youthful Clerk Maxwell, he generally wanted to

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

know "the particular go" of everything that he investigated. His feet were almost always on the homely earth, though his soul sometimes soared into the region of clouds. Tolstoy's true home was in the realms of ethics, and he was only driven into metaphysics by what appeared to him necessity. What he really loved most was the fertilizing and beneficent spiritual Nile which enriches the best active human life; and, when he left it for a time and sojourned in the bleak regions of the mystical unknown, his animating and sustaining motive really was the irrepressible desire to find the ultimate sources of the great mysterious river of God. Pity and love drove him to philosophy. Love for man made him thirst for God. Even when "a cloud receives him out of our sight," we believe and know that he has gone "to prepare a place for us," or at least to help in preparing it.

This great moralist defines human life as an aspiration after welfare, and he refuses to believe that this aspiration is meaningless or futile. He takes his stand philosophically on the instinct to live and to find a real significance in life.

In this position Tolstoy has many sympathetic

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

comrades. The plea of the wiser Pragmatists is but an enlarged and strengthened form of the ever-recurring argument of the Scottish philosopher, Sir William Hamilton, "Unless our intelligence be declared a lie." The Pragmatists speak with greatly enhanced force when they argue that, unless our *whole higher nature*, with all its abiding postulates, be declared a lie, certain faiths of the soul must be accepted as significant and true. When using this argument, they are in complete harmony with the views of the late John Fiske, who declared that he accepted the doctrine of a future life, not as he accepted the proved facts of science, but as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's working. In the instinct to live and to find a meaning in life we discern a strong implicit argument for rational Theism. This argument seems still a perfectly valid one, and also one that is not seriously weakened by any discoveries of Modern Science.

Reason cannot well deny its own postulates. If *we* are sane, it is not likely that the universe is mad. If the universe is to a great extent intelligible, it seems likely that it is the product of

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

intellect. We cannot destroy philosophy without also undermining the very foundations of all science. If the universe naturally *evokes* thought in us, it surely must *contain* thought. We certainly *seem* at times to think God's thoughts after Him. The macrocosm, the illimitable and well-ordered heavens, certainly *appears* to betray or reveal traces of a most powerful mind. Why, then, should we refuse to recognize the agency of this same mind in the workings of the microcosm, in the noblest faculties of the human soul? If the stars are reckoned as the product of reason, why should we suppose that man's highest ethical and spiritual life is the product of unreason? All real thought seems to postulate a kind of pre-established harmony between the universe and our human intelligence. The relation of knowledge seems to imply or to involve some measure of affinity between the knower and the thing known. If utter agnosticism were our predestined condition with regard to the very highest things that vitally concern our life, it does not seem probable that we should attain tolerably satisfactory knowledge as regards lower things. Human reason, after being

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

exercised with considerable success on physical problems, grows bold and venturesome. It dares to believe that God is on its side. It argues in much the same way as Manoah's wife is said to have argued in the days of old: "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, neither would He have showed us all these things, nor would, as at this time, have told us such things as these."

Can we suppose that *instinct* is full of real significance amongst animals, and yet, in its more developed and intellectualized condition in man, radically deceptive. Does God or Nature lead the blind rightly up to a certain point, and afterwards begin to mislead them? Does God begin His work well, and afterwards bungle over it deplorably? Was John Stuart Mill wise in suggesting that some strange limitation of power *compelled* God to implant in us inextinguishable desires which could never be satisfied?

Can reason aid and abet the rebellion of the senses against itself? Certainly instinct, in its earlier and cruder forms, often seems to reproach reason as a false guide, and to disparage it, as the Israelites disparaged the leadership of Moses and

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

of his God when they cried reproachfully, " Hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? " Can we truly say to our Creator, " Neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all? " If men were not destined to arrive at even provisional and partly satisfying truth, why should reason lead them into the wilderness of arid perplexity out of the well-stored Egypt of primitive instincts? Why should it conduct them into a region of total darkness and barrenness? Why should it at once confess its own powerlessness to find satisfying good, and at the same time brand and paralyse those original instincts which at least procured for man some degree of provisional life and satisfaction?

Perhaps the truth really is, as Tolstoy probably supposed, that our higher and more illuminated instincts are in fact full of *implicit* reason, of reason struggling to be born into the world of intellectually established verities. And so Pascal declared that the heart has its reasons which the reason knows not. Perhaps the very best reason, in the days of its infancy, has to rest for a time in the lowly manger of our natural affections, as the Child

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

Jesus once rested in the manger of Bethlehem. There often appears to be "no room" for new truths of the noblest sort in the rather prim inns of philosophical systems. As Emerson declared, we are frequently "wiser than we know." That great imperial human faculty, imagination, in its finest forms, is perhaps a kind of inspired and venturesome kinsman of reason. The poetry of the soul is often far truer and more significant than its prose, so that James Martineau could declare "there is no prose religion." Philosophy is often despairing, and cries, in its bewilderment, like the servant of the prophet at Dothan, "Alas! my master, how shall we do?" but the noblest sort of imagination has a keener vision, so that it perceives that the mountain is not forsaken by God, but "full of horses and chariots of fire" sent by God to deliver His people. In the formal academies of arid rationalism there sometimes stands one whom they as yet know not, "in form like unto the Son of God." Reason, without imaginative spirituality, often seems much like a bruised and baffled eagle whose wings have been clipped, so that it cannot soar into its real home on high. Logic

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

alone is not an adequate guide either to the Kingdom of God or to a satisfying life on earth.

It certainly does appear that there are more and richer things in the human soul than are dreamt of in the human understanding. The forms or shaping moulds of knowledge should not wage war against the materials of knowledge. Mere thought by itself is empty. Explicit reason should not disdain implicit reason. Abstract and formal logic should not seek to pour discredit over the rich, though novel and as yet unclassified, treasures of psychology. Severe reasoning should not ostracize wonder and awe, or expect celestial messengers to wear the prescribed uniform of rather pedantic schools under local or sectarian control. We must not demand from angels that they should at once tell us their names, in order that we may forthwith proceed to dissect and classify them as though they were insects. Wise men learn how to be content with "knowing in part."

It is certainly rather humiliating to our reason in its present state to realize the very probable fact that, *whatever* the true solution of the mys-

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

teries of the universe may be, if it were disclosed to us now with our present faculties, it would at once be considered by us to be so strange, so contrary to experience, and so miraculous as to be utterly incredible. Freethinkers may get rid of paltry miracles, but they are destined hereafter to be confronted with what will inevitably appear to be immeasurably greater miracles. So perhaps it may not be wise for them to allow their faculties of awe, wonder, and reverence to become entirely atrophied.

We feel effects long before we are able to understand causes. Astronomers, observing some of the perplexing perturbations of the planet Uranus, guessed at the existence of some other disturbing planet as yet unknown to them, and they were right. And, in a similar way, Pragmatists, such as Tolstoy and many others, may turn out to be right in inferring the existence of God from some otherwise inexplicable phenomena of human life. Tolstoy's conception of the *nature* of God was very hazy. At times he ascribed undoubted personality to God; but on other occasions he seemed to conceive of Him in a decidedly Pantheistic way.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

His theology, in his later years, appeared to waver between Unitarian Theism and a vague and mystical Pantheism; yet how can we love an impersonal being? He steadfastly held to the idea that there is and must be a God of some sort. He insisted on basing morality upon the love of God. He thought that we must love God first, and man afterwards.

As a *verifying* faculty, the great Russian knew well that reason is of the very highest value. He also really valued science, whilst keenly conscious of its inevitable limitations. He thought that, in its unceasing search for the *origin* of life, it had almost forgotten to seek for the *meaning* of life. Like other profound thinkers, the Russian moralist held that we must search for God with *all* our distinctly human faculties. Thus only can we really find Him. Reason, when it refuses to co-operate with the other faculties of our nature, is often the author of at least apparent confusion. It sometimes introduces into the best human life a vacillation and incoherence of aim from which our half-animal life is happily almost free. Hence it is clear that reason should not harshly blame us for seeking

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

supplementary assistance. To some tortured spirits it has seemed, after prolonged and sorrowful search, that reason threatens to cast a withering blight over all the most interesting and cherished elements of our existence. It makes an arid wilderness of unceasing doubt, and calls it peace. Reason threatens to afflict us with a hopeless and incurable vacillation, as it afflicted the lonely Amiel, whose aspirations were unceasingly baffled, or else it sometimes practically offers us the dreadful alternatives of a very superior pig-sty or a madhouse for the learned as our habitual dwelling-place.

Reason, when working in harmony with our other noblest faculties, seems a real friend; but, when isolated from them in a kind of proud and despotic sovereignty, it sometimes assumes a decidedly sinister aspect, as though the dread inherent irony of the universe had been concentrated in it and had visited our earth, in order to mock or deride the vanity of all our best endeavours. We sometimes feel inclined to describe the purely speculative reason as Goldwin Smith described Jowett, as having no *clinch* in its nature, as tend-

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

ing to keep itself and its followers in a state of perpetual doubt and hesitation. When Bishop Butler declared that reason is the only faculty that we have by which to judge everything, including revelation itself, he used the word reason in a large sense, so as to include what Kant called practical reason. And it is manifest that Tolstoy also used the word in the same sense. Reason, as conceived by him, was closely and vitally connected with our *ethical* life. In its purely speculative aspect, reason often seems to be the chosen home of endless contradictions or antinomies, so that it fails to help us in the emergencies and difficulties of actual life. *Character* seems necessary in order to give speculative reason a clinch, and so enable it to come to some definite conclusions. We must *do the will of God*, if we wish to be able to judge of the truth or falsehood of doctrines affecting our highest life. The practical reason seems needed to strengthen the purely speculative reason, as Aaron and Hur held up or stayed the wearied hands of Moses when the battle was raging against Amalek, and victory depended upon the ability of exhausted Moses to continue holding up his hands.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

Certainly the speculative reason, when acting alone, often appears austere and stern to many of the best of the sons of men. It either speaks to them in an unknown tongue or else in too hard and inhuman a way. Can it, then, blame us if we turn sometimes to our nearer kindred, if we turn to the "Word made flesh," to a kind of incarnate or humanized reason, or even if from such Judaic harshness we "turn to the Gentiles," and seek for God's primitive and abiding evangel in the *whole* of man's nature rather than in the cheerless and pedantic schools of formal logicians? Our ethical nature, especially its finest product called Love, often seems to outrun merely speculative reason in the pilgrimage to satisfying truth. To many of us, whether we will or no, human heroism often appears to be a far better revealer of God than any amount of flawless syllogisms.

Tolstoy, in most of his moods, and when not misled by a spurious metaphysical mysticism, as he sometimes certainly was, perceived plainly enough that our pilgrimage must necessarily be from the human to the divine. *In his hours of clearest vision*, he would have agreed with Jowett when he

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

declared that we are more sure of the validity of our own moral convictions than of the existence of God, and more sure of the existence of God than of a future life for our race. For Tolstoy usually, and for us always, the way to faith is, for the most part, an inductive way, as it was to Manoah's wife. We travel from man to God, from the facts of experience to definite doctrines; and we wish to submit ourselves to the joint guardianship of the best and largest human reason and the best human love. Neither of these leaders satisfies us, when taken alone. Then only do we feel safe when reason no longer depreciates or "envies" love, and when love no longer "vexes" reason, when they advance before us as brother warriors in our perilous pilgrimage to the celestial city. We believe that the true messengers or prophets of God bring to the human race very varied but not ultimately or intrinsically discordant words of guidance and warning.

As regards the *origin* of the human soul, Tolstoy was far too dogmatic and oracularly mystical. He says that "the bond which unites all the scattered consciousnesses, which latter in their turn unite

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

one body, is something very definite, although independent of the conditions of time and space; we bring it with us into the world from a region outside of time and space; and this *something*, which consists in a certain exclusive relationship of my being to the world, is my only veritable and true self. . . . My relationship to the world was not set up in this life, nor did it begin with my body, nor with the series of consciousnesses which succeed each other in time, but was prior to them." Yet Tolstoy denies personal immortality.

His statement just given seems to be very rash and unduly dogmatic. As regards the origin and destiny of the human soul, Carlyle spoke far more cautiously and wisely when he exclaimed, "But whence, O heaven, whither? Sense knows not; faith knows not; only that it is through mystery to mystery, from God and to God." Tolstoy, whilst wisely rejecting the Positivist's doctrine as to immortality, seems to involve himself in hopeless difficulties when he wrote thus: "It is clear that, for men, the perpetuation of the human race cannot satisfy the incessant demand for an eternal special self; but the idea of life beginning over

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

again implies that of the cessation of life; and, if life has not existed in the past, has not existed always, then it cannot exist after."

This teaching as to the need for a special self appears to be in flat contradiction to the same writer's repudiation of personal existence after death. What can he mean by a self that is not personal? And his teaching is full of other difficulties. He seems to confuse potential existence with actual, indeterminate with determinate. The *ultimate source* of life is unquestionably eternal; but its *differentiated products* are not eternal. Does our author mean that God *could not* create, that He could not bring, out of the richness of His own primal life, things *new* as well as old? Tolstoy also seems to minimize unduly the influence of *heredity* in determining the character of the soul. The Ego itself, as merely an abiding principle of unity, may perhaps be independent of heredity; it may come to us from an unknown world as a kind of vague and undeveloped effluence from the divine mind; but its definite differentiation into character certainly appears to come from ancestors. The original "treasure" is very greatly influenced

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

by the earthen vessels in which it is deposited. The flesh greatly influences the spirit to which it gives embodiment in time and space.

Tolstoy could not possibly *know* that each self or soul existed from all eternity as a unit, outside of time and space. If time and space are necessary forms or necessary *data* of our intelligence, we cannot possibly escape from them even for a brief moment, and view things as they would manifest themselves to a being for whom time and space do not exist. We cannot, even for a moment, jump out of our intellectual skins. We cannot thus take by storm the arcana of the universe. The eagle cannot outsoar the atmosphere. The conditioned cannot become the unconditioned. No clairvoyance or intellectual intuition of the Infinite and Eternal is possible for man with his present faculties. Sir William Hamilton's arguments against Schelling's doctrine of Intellectual Intuition appear to be unanswerable. If, for some brief moment, our soul was taken out of time and space, if it were thus unclothed, we should inevitably lose for the time what we call our consciousness, which implies time as succession. Stripped of our

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

needed and habitual faculties of cognition, we should really *know* nothing. At the very best we could only *feel* in a vague and indeterminate way, and this vague feeling could not be recalled, and so could not afterwards be translated into the language of ordinary intellectual life. The ecstasy would pass away and be as though it had never been.

It seems perfectly manifest that Tolstoy's supposed or implied spiritual voyage into a region beyond time and space was as purely imaginary as the intellectual and spiritual journeys of the intrepid Swedenborg. And it also seems clear that, even if that voyage had been real, it would have been quite fruitless, so far as any permanent and communicable results are concerned. Our traveller would perhaps have found himself in a land of stupendous nightmare, as full of competing inconceivabilities as the region depicted for us by Dean Mansel, wherein the Infinite and the Absolute were supposed to dwell at once in eternal union and in eternally irreconcilable dissidence, each torn by its own internal discords and quite unable to harmonize itself with the other, like some unhappy couple

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

held fast in the bonds of a forced and uncongenial marriage. Or perhaps our venturesome explorer would not have been able to *exist* at all, even for a short sojourn, in that strange world in which conflicting inconceivabilities for ever wage unceasing war against each other. He might perhaps have found that world *perilous* as well as bewildering, "a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof," if indeed that dread realm tolerated, even for a moment, the intrusion of alien inhabitants, presuming to enter into it with no wedding garments of superhuman endowments.

Closely connected with Tolstoy's teaching as to the origin—or rather the eternal existence—of the human soul, is his view as to the nature of a future life. He says that belief in a *personal* future life belongs to a barbarous age, and was not taught by Jesus Christ. One cannot help asking whether Plato, Cicero, Augustine, Browning, Tennyson, and James Martineau, and Emerson in his less Pantheistic moods, were all barbarians intellectually. Our author does not perceive that, if personality were really destroyed, all that is best and finest in human life would also be destroyed. The self,

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

when stripped of personality, would be only a poor *ghost* of a self, and quite incapable of love. It does not follow that, because the cruder conceptions of personality were rather absurd, personality itself, in all its phases, is therefore an absurd idea. The idea of GOD has been altered, developed, and rationalized in the course of ages quite as much as the idea of personality. Yet we do not say that the idea of God is intrinsically absurd in all its phases.

There is scarcely any great question concerning which more irrelevant nonsense has been written than concerning personality. Matthew Arnold never really understood this matter. Though a most graceful writer, he was neither a very deep thinker, nor a very exact and patient one. He argued as if he had travelled through the whole universe and thoroughly examined every possible phase of personality. The fact that *we*, in our present condition, cannot depict to ourselves kinds of personality exempt from our present human limitations, does not in the least prove that none such *exist*. There may very well be in higher worlds forms of personality as much transcending

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

ours as ours transcends the vague and shadowy personality of animals. If in the animal world there exist any philosophers of a school similar to that of Matthew Arnold, it is not altogether unlikely that they firmly believe that personality necessarily implies four legs or a tail. Though he posed as an agnostic, Arnold was in some ways a very rash dogmatist. Probably there are in the universe many enlarged forms of personality compared to which ours as known at present is only a meagre and shadowy outline. Possibly personality may hereafter be vastly enlarged without losing its intrinsic nature. Personality may be agglomerated in larger masses, as it was supposed to be in the men-women mentioned by Plato.

Possibly something resembling the Christian idea of the highest personality as a kind of Trinity in unity may be the culmination of it. Herbert Spencer's difficulties in believing in the consciousness or self-consciousness of God imply the very unnecessary conception that the divine nature is merely a lonely and self-enclosed unity, a kind of Cronos who has devoured his offspring, if he ever had any. The Trinitarians make room for God's

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

self-consciousness in one way, and the Unitarians in another way. The latter conceive of the *universe* as God's Eternal Son, as to some extent His *alter Ego*, or at least as His partially objectified self, in whose spacious regions the divine intellect roams freely throughout the ages. Perhaps God purposely assigns some share of His personality, some degree of selfhood, to His children, in order that He may hold communion with them. If God were the only person in the whole universe, we cannot help thinking that He would be completely solitary. Perhaps He stands a little way off from each separate soul, in order that it may be able to draw nigh unto Him with *voluntary* allegiance and sympathy.

So far as our personality is an *isolating* power, we are quite willing that it should pass away in a higher world. We would gladly give up all that is *repellent* in it, so that souls might flow freely into souls. We believe that personality might very well lose its present cramping and fettering limitations without losing its essential features. We believe that eventually we may be made "partakers of the divine nature" without forfeit-

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

ing the best and most vital characteristics of human nature. We believe that personality might very well become diaphanous and penetrable or porous without impairment of its present efficacy, that it might be "clothed upon" with new powers, whilst losing nothing that is truly valuable in its present powers.

To the vast majority of our race a strictly impersonal future life would appear to be no real *life* at all. A self devoid of personality, if such a thing could exist, would be ethically and emotionally colourless, and therefore uninteresting. If our emancipation from time and space is to mean the utter dehumanizing and depersonalizing of our higher nature, if it is to involve the removal of what we now believe to be the essential conditions of the best and truest *love* in all regions of existence, then we feel convinced that such progress would be a ruinous victory. Love could scarcely exist without distinct personality. We cannot believe in the loves of the triangles or the categories, or even of pallid entities and quiddities. If the whole universe were agglomerated into one huge Ego with very slightly differentiated phases, or

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

into an Ego with only *ghosts* of itself, we believe that its best ethical and spiritual life would be reduced to ashes, and the moral world would henceforth be like the moon, a mournful world full of the blasted possibilities of life.

In putting *on* a kind of Pantheistic universality, in discarding all characteristic features, we should put *off* all true nobleness. We should henceforth be good only as the winds are good. We might still in some sense receive the *gifts* of God, but we could feel no love for the divine *giver*. Thus all the highest kinds of human development would pass away. Ethical choice would become impossible, since that implies personality. The Son of God would go forth to war no more. Strenuousness would die away. We should *drift* as the leaves. Self-sacrifice would be impossible, when a distinct self no longer existed. Adoration or worship also seems to imply the existence of open-eyed personality or self-consciousness. There is nothing admirable in *unintentional* worship, if such worship there could be. Heroism and the spirit of adventure—so dear to the heart of man—would be

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

entirely gone. Without personality the universe would become even worse than Browning's imaginary star, Rephan. It would be a sort of abiding Golgotha. The city of God would be nothing better than a necropolis. In such a world it is difficult to see how even *intellect* would survive, for the relation of knowledge seems to imply, at least for a time, some measure of *difference* or detachment, as well as of resemblance, between the knower and the thing known. The rushing together and fusion of all its intellectual and spiritual atoms would be as fatal to the higher universe as a similar coalescence of its material atoms would be to the physical universe. Death or torpor would reign supreme.

Surely it is unwise to depict the future life in such a way as to render it entirely unattractive to men in general. Tolstoy seems, moreover, to contradict himself in his teaching about the future life. He says that the soul is fundamentally always *the same*, and that, when it came into this world, it did not come as a merely vague and featureless potentiality, but as an individualized self—a self with decided tastes in the shape of

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

definite likings and dislikings. If this be so, and if the self is to be conceived as always remaining the same, what ground has the Russian teacher for denying a personal life to the soul in other worlds? It is surely impossible to imagine a being with decided *character*, with definite likings and dislikings, without personality. And, according to our perplexing teacher, if the soul *once* had personality, it *must* retain it for ever.

If men in general should ever receive Tolstoy's apparent conception of a future life, they would certainly cease to care for renewed existence after death. And so our *present* life would lose a great deal of its best inspiration. The hope of immortality would then cease to nerve men for high spiritual enterprises. Most men would then practically ignore the idea of a future existence. Worldliness would then seem the highest practical wisdom and the plain teaching of common-sense. We should snatch at real enjoyment whilst we are able to procure it. We should try to make the most of our transient personality. The philosophy of prudent sensuality might then appear to many to be the highest wisdom. It would then seem as

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

if, in literal truth, "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise," as if high aspirations were mere folly and a waste of time, as if earthly life was a mere joke, and the future life a fantastic and bewildering dream, as if moral seriousness were almost a sin, as if Rénan was right in thinking that the old French gaiety of heart is the best philosophy of life, as if the whole universe was either a playground, or a gaudy simulacrum, or a huge mocking irony, as if human nobleness was a mere abortion born by chance and out of due season, an unwelcome intruder in the unending comedy of ceaseless and purposeless development, in which hapless beings struggled up into personality, only to lose it when it had become truly admirable, as if the whole universe was the production of a capricious or vacillating madman who did not really know what he wanted.

Tolstoy was by nature a vivid and profound psychologist, and a metaphysician only by necessity. His true and original affinity was with Augustine, Dante, Pascal, and Cardinal Newman rather than with abstract philosophers like Parmenides or Hegel. His temperament was too

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

fervid and passionate for a great metaphysician. He was deficient in intellectual calmness and patience. His mission was to *feel* things rather than to analyse them. He was more of a poet than of a logician. His thoughts spontaneously embodied themselves in pictures rather than in abstract categories or intellectual forms. To a very great extent he thought in metaphors. His ideas flowed rapidly and sometimes wildly, like some impetuous mountain stream. In Emersonian language, the Russian seer was often "wiser than he knew." Some of his most intense convictions could never be adequately set forth in syllogisms. Consequently we are at liberty to accept in some degree almost all his ethics, whilst repudiating a large portion of his metaphysics.

In the case of Tolstoy, as in that of Amiel, it seems plain that the real and original basis of his nature and the man within the man were profoundly social and benevolent. To some extent he was a kind of Good Samaritan who had lost his way. The impersonal or Buddhistic element in him was an after-growth due more to circumstances than to inherent necessity, and not expressive of

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

his fundamental feelings. He only renounced the world because he could not mend it or make it truly happy. Stoical asceticism was in his case a sort of confession of failure, a kind of anodyne in some ways useful to assuage the pangs of baffled benevolence. Christ was born in the scarred and bruised spirit of the noble reformer long before despairing Buddha and the mystical ascetics influenced it.

Tolstoy's conversion itself was not, as many have supposed, an intellectual decline or fall. That final spiritual storm had long been gathering in the gloomy recesses of his tortured soul, and its distant preparatory rumblings were quite audible, at least to those who had ears with which to hear, in many touching and pathetic passages in his greatest stories. But what *did* constitute a kind of decline or fall was the great writer's partial captivity in the bondage of asceticism and an irrational system of metaphysics. To a considerable extent this partial captivity marred his later teaching, though it never became the *real* basis of his religion, which was ultimately built on the abiding rock of a true psychology illuminated by

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

a most piercing insight into the deepest recesses of man's strangely complex nature.

In his later years it is to be feared that the depersonalizing, mystical, and ascetic elements in Tolstoy's religion were becoming very unduly aggressive. His soul was trying, though happily not quite successfully, to bring itself into harmony with the doctrine preached by Emerson, when, in one of his Pantheistic moods, he declared that, through our particular human affections for persons, we are put in training for a love that knows not persons. To most of us this strictly impersonal love cannot but appear rather like that feeling which Aristotle called *watery* affection. We consider it a kind of Satan assuming the garb of an angel of light, a sort of *emotional tepidness* that seeks to array itself in the glorious robes of that divine charity which knows how to *concentrate* as well as to diffuse itself, which can truly love all men whilst it is not ashamed to love some more than others. True Pauline and Christian charity grows and thrives all the more vigorously because, from time to time, it finds a rallying place in certain fervent personal loves. In these it

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

wisely concentrates itself and gathers together its scattered forces, in order that it may flow forth with enhanced energy and increased volume over the wide weary wastes of universal human sorrow and suffering. Jesus Himself could genuinely love *all* His disciples, though some of them were dearer and more congenial to Him than others.

True charity or love in its noblest forms is in some measure like the divine love. In some ways it is ubiquitous, though in other ways it seems condensed or concentrated. As Dr Martineau said concerning the omnipresence of God and His *special* presence in the soul of Christ, no distant star *missed* Him the more because He shone with such peculiar brightness in the fair glory of that pure life. Emerson's philosophy of emotion is certainly a false and misleading one, and it is a great pity that, in his later years, Tolstoy in some degree adopted it. It is by specially loving some men, and by *continuing* to love them *specially*, that we are best enabled to learn wide-spreading benevolence. We must *go on loving* those whom we have seen with special intimacy, if we are to

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

be able, with any rational persistency to love those whom we have not seen.

The false teaching of the ascetics and of men like Emerson was perhaps beginning to some extent to diminish the natural affectionateness of Tolstoy, as a rather different species of asceticism influenced Pascal when he came to look with disapprobation on the signs of strong affection which he saw between his sister and her children. In both cases alike the true Son of Man was being sacrificed to a far lower ideal.

But happily the Russian prophet died before his natural nobleness and his profound and most tender humanity could be very much injured by a false philosophy. God "proved him, and found him worthy for Himself." To "depart and be with Christ," to return to the bosom of that impassioned human love from which he had in some measure wandered, was indeed "far better" for this great pilgrim than to linger on whilst his finest spiritual and moral qualities were gradually becoming partially atrophied. When the scarred and battered soul of this true follower of the Son of Man migrated to the fontal Love of the universe,

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

we may well believe that the dimness of his partial captivity was over for ever. When his aching and partially frozen heart was warmed and quickened by closest vital contact with the Sacred Heart of Jesus—the most loving and profoundly human heart that ever gladdened our dark and suffering world,—we may well believe that all wish to be depersonalized completely passed away, and that his original affectionateness returned in fullest force, so that he now knows right well that man's appointed way to the divine is through prolonged experience of the human, that our fellow-men are not snares of Satan, but stepping-stones by which we slowly climb towards the very loftiest throne of God.

We believe that in another and larger world the soul of this true seeker after God has recovered its own veritable nature in all its glorious plenitude of gifts, that he has recognized the inner and abiding significance of St Paul's daring saying, "Love never faileth." We believe that the partial eclipse of human love is now over in this struggling spirit, and that he has at last perceived that the truest prophets of God call upon us to

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

“cease from man” in his lower phases, only in order that we may commune more intimately with man in his higher and God-illuminated phases. The greatest religious guides bid us turn from the mere *surface* of men, chiefly in order that we may dive down into those marvellous depths in which God for ever dwells as the very soul of their souls. Viewed merely as an *animal*, man is a thick veil which hides God. Viewed as a spirit capable of real love, man is the true Shekinah, a veritable temple of God, a genuine incarnation of many of the noblest attributes of the Most High. And though at present “the light shineth in darkness,” though now, in its unwilling subjection to vanity, the creature is but a very imperfect mirror of the moral splendour of the Creator, yet for patient and sympathetic eyes there shine forth at times many genuine fore-gleams of future perfection, many *startling* indications of a divine glory to come, so that we cannot bear to think of separation from our race, so that, as we realize the profound *suggestiveness* of man’s struggling and sorely-baffled heroism, we lift up our eyes to heaven with exultant hopefulness, and, undismayed by present

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

sinfulness, cry aloud with the aspiring and pilgrim spirit of the great apostle of love, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be."

During his later years Tolstoy's spiritual vision was certainly far less keen and penetrating than that of St Paul. He knew that "by man comes death," but he scarcely realized the complementary truth that "by man comes also the resurrection from the dead." The Apostle to the Gentiles knew that, if the sons of Adam kill us, the sons of God make us alive again; but the Russian moralist tended to lose sight of this latter consolatory truth. The influence of Rousseau and his broad humanity, so dominant in Tolstoy's earlier life, was in great measure replaced by the rather malign influence of souls like Pascal at his worst, when most enslaved by a hard, gloomy, and irrational and dehumanizing asceticism.

However, as I have already said, the process of intellectual and moral and emotional degeneration in this noble soul was not allowed to go very far. The spirit of Christ and, to some extent, the teaching of Rousseau, continued to counteract

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

the evil influence of mystical asceticism. The seed of genuine Christianity remained in Tolstoy even unto the end, so that he could not sin or err fatally. We believe that his apparent desire to be depersonalized in a future life was but a transient one, in some ways resembling the wish of Professor Huxley that his moral nature might be mechanically regulated like a clock. In both cases alike, the real and abiding man, the truly characteristic self, would soon grow utterly weary of such necessitated and meaningless virtue. Huxley and the Russian moralist were both essentially warriors, and the longing for rest was but a temporary sign of ethical exhaustion. Cardinal Newman seems also to have experienced this same spiritual lassitude and despondency. He said, in a letter to the late Dean Plumptre, that he longed for complete fixity of condition in heaven, and could not reconcile himself to the notion of a state in which a moral fall might still be possible. Great souls, like that of Elijah, seem *specially* liable to such fits of despair. Their high ideals pour contempt over their actual achievements.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

But, now that the noble-minded Russian has gone behind the veil, we believe that his temporary despondency has for ever passed away. We cannot imagine that fiery nature reduced to a state of passive recipiency or inertness. We remember the wise teaching of John Stuart Mill who declared his belief that, if there is any future life for our race, it is not likely to be wanting in the best qualities of our present life. And certainly benevolent activity is one of the very best elements of our present existence. No doubt the soul of Russia's greatest ethical teacher has now "come to itself," has taken up again its old glorious labour, and now thoroughly realizes the profound wisdom of the great Son of Man when He exclaimed, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." It is impossible for those who really believe in a future life to suppose that the souls of the most heroic of the human race are therein deprived of their most vitally characteristic qualities. The peace of God is the happy peace of successful and benevolent work, and not that of suppressed energies. If one should seek to find the emancipated spirit of the Russian reformer in another world, one

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

would naturally look for it amongst the best and most active *missionaries* of redeeming pity and love, and not amongst the spiritually idle and apathetic. If the greatest and noblest of the sons of men do cease hereafter at times from what is called active work, we believe that, during that transient cessation from labour, they would be found sojourning with martyr spirits under the altar of the Most High, and crying sympathetically to Him, as they look back lovingly on earth's unending sorrows and afflictions, "How long, O Lord, how long?" True prayer is true labour.

Tolstoy has bequeathed to us a precious legacy of profoundly suggestive ethical and spiritual thought. And our manifest duty is to use it wisely, so that it may be fruitful and a blessing to coming generations of men. We must remember that many of his precepts were essentially counsels of perfection, based on a belief in the true progressiveness of our race. It will not be wise for us to demand from beginners in the higher life complete adherence to all these precepts in their very exacting elevation. We must remember that Jesus Himself practised a wise economy in dealing

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

out His wisdom to His uncultivated disciples. The noblest ideals are unnecessarily and often permanently discredited when they are born out of due season, when they are offered to men before their minds are ripe for their reception. St Paul was content for a time to nourish some of his followers with milk fit for babes, when they were not ready for strong meat. We must lead on our weak ethical pilgrims very gradually. We must remember that it is only in almost the last stage of their spiritual journey that they can be fit to hold adequate and unrestrained communion with the shining ones of the celestial kingdom, with souls like those of St Augustine, Thomas à Kempis, Dante, Fénelon, Madame Guyon, and Leo Tolstoy.

Considering that the Russian teacher had lost all faith in the infallibility of the Bible, the extreme and urgent literalism with which he treated some of its ethical and social precepts is remarkable. He makes no allowance for the fact that, at certain periods, some truths are obliged to be so emphasized as to be overstated, if men's attention is to be drawn to them at all successfully. If all men everywhere saw everything exactly in its

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

true and just proportions, the *enthusiasm* necessary for bringing about great ethical and spiritual changes would be lacking. Some true doctrines *must* be exaggerated for a time, if they are to secure consideration. They must strive and cry and lift up their voices in the streets. Different ages of the world seem to require that some truths should temporarily be given a prominence and an almost exclusive prominence to which they are not permanently entitled. Reaction almost always goes too far for a time, as it did in the case of the Protestant Reformation; and later thought corrects its exaggerations. New truths have to fight for their existence, and so they assume a rather undue hostility to other truths, which appear to be contradictory to them, whilst in reality they are only complementary. A judicious Hooker could never have accomplished the work done by Luther. Tolstoy's mind, like that of Luther, was in some ways ill-balanced. It was far more fervent than comprehensive. It was very deficient in the judicial temper.

To men of *practical* minds gifted with sobriety of judgment, Tolstoy's glorification of permanent

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

anarchy in social matters is perhaps the most repulsive element in his teaching. He failed to perceive that anarchy, like scepticism, can only be regarded as essentially preparatory, as a kind of John the Baptist in the ethical and social world. Men cannot live wisely and effectively in a state of permanent revolution. Because *some* laws are bad, it does not follow that we ought to have *no* laws at all. It is difficult to imagine a prosperous and happy nation which should have no government, no laws, no police, no private property, no resistance to violence and evil, and no restraints on lawless people. Till men become angels, some enforcement of well-considered laws seems indispensably necessary.

Socialism, in its extreme forms, would not be a really unmixed good. It postulates conditions which are never likely to be found in this world. It arises out of a correct perception of the very real miseries and evils of our present civilization; but, in its violent reaction against them, it would assuredly introduce other evils. Doubtless, the present immense difference between the extremely rich and the extremely poor is both undesirable and

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

unchristian; but the desire for *absolute* equality amongst men is a foolish one.

Though the *poor* should no longer be with us, inequality in other forms would still exist. Differences of age, talents, and experience cannot be abolished. Nor is it really desirable that they should be abolished. Some, at least, of the *needs* of others are valuable as giving a sphere for the exercise of many of the highest qualities of our race. If all men were equally rich and fortunate, there would not be much sphere for generosity. Many of the tenderest forms of human affection are based on inequality. Love between the old and the young generally postulates very great differences in knowledge and power. Such protecting and confiding affection need not in the least imply any sense of *patronizing* superiority on the one side or any degrading servility on the other side.

In his latest years Tolstoy's socialism was considerably marred by the intrusion of ascetic, stoical, and even *anti-social* elements. He appears to have wished to make himself and other men self-sufficing and independent of others, ignoring the abiding truth that "no man liveth unto himself."

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

If we are to love people, we must learn love by mutual service, and, if all men were really equal in strength and wisdom, such service would comparatively seldom be required. The weakness and wants of some men at once bind them to their fellows and evoke love in the hearts of their fellows. If human life is to be a training in love, *some* inequalities, like some pains and sorrows, must remain, and we must be content to receive much from others.

Very great variety seems to be necessary in order to make human life genuinely *interesting*, and some forms of extreme socialism would certainly tend to lessen variety.

Tolstoy did not perceive that real socialism is hardly reconcilable with that intense *individuality* which he and Rousseau so greatly valued. The state of nature, so greatly idealized by these thinkers, on account of its supposed absolute freedom, is scarcely compatible with the highly-organized condition of strictly socialistic life. Spontaneity and the spirit of individual venturesomeness would probably be much diminished. In fact, it would scarcely be too much to say that

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

the Russian teacher's ideal gathers together two really *conflicting* elements, intense and unrestrained individualism and the complete subordination of the individual to the community. Of these two elements it is evident that the individualistic one, with its attendant freedom from law, was the more deep-seated and fundamental one in the mind of Tolstoy. Adequate co-operation between a number of individually lawless units would appear to be impossible; and we now perceive that such co-operation is the very soul of progress and the only thing that can mitigate the abominable and inhuman horror of the unceasing and relentless struggle for existence. Such co-operation is a kind of angel of the agony to sympathetic and afflicted spirits in our restless age. It is evident that the Russian moralist's philosophy is, in great measure, as a house divided against itself.

The real truth appears to be that the mind and soul of Leo Tolstoy were, to a great extent, in a state of chaos. His teaching is profoundly *suggestive* and interesting, but neither coherent, well-reasoned, nor final. Like Socrates, this

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

innovating moralist tried to wake men up from the deep slumber of fancied knowledge and goodness; but he gave them very little permanently satisfying knowledge. He was a kind of John the Baptist in the moral and social world, by his unflinching sincerity, by his keen and unsparing exposure of present evils and shams, and by his very exacting ethical austerity, making ready the way for the advent of a greater son of man who has yet to come. But we ought always to remember that this rugged evangelist had in him a warm heart of sympathy, pity, and universal love, which we do not find in the stern precursor of Jesus. Notwithstanding his grave intellectual faults and deficiencies, the scarred soul of the Russian pilgrim has been to very many a kind of battered Greatheart in their ever-recurring hours of despondency and weakness. His invincible belief in the coming complete victory of human love is as a strong cordial to many fainting hearts of the benevolent, as they endeavour to follow Christ through the bleak and cheerless wilderness of this present evil world, with all its appalling cruelties, with all its gross and per-

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

plexing darkness, and with all its sorely baffled aspirations.

The mingled weakness and strength of Tolstoy as a religious seer and teacher are nowhere so strikingly exhibited as in his doctrine of complete non-resistance to evil. In that doctrine we find in strange combination a profound perception of the real drift of Christianity and very considerable blindness or ignorance as to the best and most efficient way of propagating practical religion in the present age. The piercing insight of a genuine prophet is joined with an almost childish ignorance as to the best means of establishing the kingdom of God on earth in present circumstances. In a very remarkable way God showed Tolstoy the things that shall be hereafter in the realms of ethical and spiritual life; but his impatience and precipitation of judgment often made him overlook the very real difficulties which beset us when we endeavour to follow Christ adequately and completely. He, like Emerson, was often much too long-sighted with regard to the coming reign of righteousness on earth, just as Carlyle was habitually far too short-sighted.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

It is perfectly manifest that, with regard to the life of *nations*, the policy of absolute non-resistance to evil would lead to disastrous or very undesirable results, if it were carried out thoroughly in the present state of the world. Europe, in general, was quite right in resisting the ambition of Napoleon for almost universal sovereignty. And in our age it is plain enough that unresisting submission to the power of the great German empire would produce very evil results. No one nation has a monopoly of all the fine qualities of humanity. The world would be far poorer if the distinctive qualities of the best French, English, and Italian life were all destroyed, or at least vastly impaired by the Germanizing of collective Europe. In the present unsatisfactory condition of the world, war, or at least readiness for war, appears to be really necessary, if all the best elements and varieties of distinctive national life are to be preserved. It is eminently undesirable that one country should practically swallow all the others; and so the duty of self-defence against active aggression is manifest enough.

And in our ordinary daily life as individuals it

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

seems clear that Tolstoy's teaching cannot always be carried into practice with good results. If the Russian moralist had seen a ruffian horribly ill-treating a child, a woman, or a weak and defenceless old man, one feels quite sure that he would have used force on that occasion, in violation of the strict letter of his own ethical code of laws. Premature wisdom sometimes leads to practical folly.

With regard to the feeling called anger, Tolstoy's views appear to be not only exaggerated, but also to a great extent false and misleading. Probably his own passionate temperament caused him to see only the bad or injurious side of that state of mind. His teaching would have been far more well-balanced and satisfactory if he had read and digested the wise discourses of Bishop Butler about Resentment and the Forgiveness of Injuries. Butler clearly perceived what the Russian moralist failed to perceive, viz., that the feelings called anger and resentment have a real and legitimate place in the economy of human life. The world in general *does* perceive this fact—Christ is all the dearer to us because of His anger against the

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

hypocrisy, tyranny, and cruelty of the Pharisees. When condemning anger itself as wrong in all circumstances, Tolstoy spoke unadvisedly and without adequate thought. What he really intended to condemn was indiscriminating anger—the anger that is a kind of temporary madness, the anger which only sees one side of a quarrel, the anger that makes no allowance for an opponent, the unchristian anger which quite ignores the abiding and universal duty of compassion. As Butler thought, St Paul certainly made a distinction between wise anger and sin, when he gave us the precept, “Be ye angry, and sin not,” which practically means, “Though ye be angry, sin not.” The wise Bishop of Durham considered that all our distinctively human tendencies or qualities have a real meaning and value, whereas the Russian ascetic wished to extirpate or at least to suppress some of them. The abuse of a thing or a faculty does not prove that it has no use if dealt with thoughtfully.

Butler expressed his opinion on this subject in these calm and deliberate words: “We should learn to be cautious, lest we *charge God foolishly* by

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

ascribing that to Him, or to the nature He has given us, which is owing wholly to our own abuse of it. . . . Human nature, considered as the divine workmanship, should, methinks, be treated as sacred, for *in the image of God made He man*. That passion from which men take occasion to run into the dreadful vices of malice and revenge, even that passion, as implanted in our nature by God, is not only innocent, but a generous movement of mind." Tolstoy apparently failed to understand the innate generosity and nobleness of the highest kinds of anger. Christ was never angry about injuries done to Himself, but often angry about injuries done to God's creatures by their fellow-men.

Butler clearly perceived that *compassion* is mingled with the best form of anger. He wrote thus: "Though injury, injustice, oppression, the baseness of ingratitude, are the natural objects of indignation, or if you please of resentment, as before explained, yet they are likewise the objects of compassion, as they are their own punishment, and without repentance will for ever be so. No one ever did a designed injury to another, but at

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

the same time he did a much greater to himself. If therefore we would consider things justly, such an one is, according to the natural course of our affections, an object of compassion as well as of displeasure; and to be affected really in this manner, I say really in opposition to show and pretence, argues the true greatness of mind. We have an example of forgiveness in this way in its utmost perfection, and which indeed includes in it all that is good, in that prayer of our blessed Saviour on the cross: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' "

It is not quite easy to understand very exactly what the real teaching of Christ and of His apostles was essentially with regard to non-resistance to evil. Tolstoy's demands were to a very great extent based on this famous passage in the Sermon on the Mount: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy—but I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." And the Russian moralist considered that his ethical demands received even

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

more explicit sanction from these other words used by Jesus on the same occasion: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And, if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain."

This teaching certainly seems quite plain, and there can be no reasonable doubt that Christ really wished His disciples to show forth to the world the wonderful powers of meekness, gentleness, self-effacement, and forgiving pity and love. Perhaps Jesus may have considered that there were some *special* reasons, at that stage of the world's development, for displaying the invincible and attractive might of the gentler qualities of man's nature. Both the Jews and the Romans at that period were mostly hard in their characters, and were believers in force. So it may be that our Lord desired to show them the superior efficacy of reasonableness, pity, and love. He said that His

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

kingdom was not of this world; but He declared plainly that He had come to found a far greater, wider, and more enduring kingdom than any then in existence. Probably He thought it necessary that the hard world should be startled out of its old inveterate belief in force or violence. Thus only could it be led on to higher things.

Moreover, it is manifest that the only powers then available, by which Christianity could hope to subdue the coarse forcefulness of the surrounding world, were to be found in the highest passive qualities of our nature. At that period it certainly seemed, judging by the results, that God had chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong. Christ wished to introduce a partially new and most potent element into the higher life of man. He knew that Love would eventually conquer the world, that it would achieve wondrous results, which neither the exclusive wisdom of the Greeks nor the stern practical force and energy of the Romans had been able to achieve. Force had been found to be no adequate remedy for the woes of mankind. Henceforth sympathy and love were to be tried. And so perhaps, in order to startle

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

men out of their old erroneous convictions, Jesus purposely put His new truth into extreme and apparently paradoxical forms. In this way, He appears to have startled and for the moment almost repelled Nicodemus, coming to Him as to a conventional teacher of a very superior sort.

And who shall venture to say that the magnificent confidence of Jesus in the ultimate triumph of the gentler qualities of our complex nature was misplaced or ungrounded? Christ let loose a mighty force hitherto sore let and fettered in its earlier courses. And that force eventually subdued the obstinate world, and even now has many glorious victories in store for it. The wonderful patience, the grand fidelity, the inexhaustible tenderness and compassion, the all-embracing and all-forgiving love of our Lord's earlier disciples *must*, in the very nature of things, have sometimes stirred the hearts of persecutors down in their very depths. Jesus and His followers gave to many of their enemies a new, truer, and more adequate revelation of the significance of *their own* inner faculties. The very strangeness of Christianity, its completely unearthly nature, must in itself

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

have been to many a suggestion of the advent of a new power into human life. Men now began to see a real glory in what was commonly reckoned shame. The cross of ignominy became a veritable theophany. The sublime seemed almost to pour contempt over ordinary utilitarian virtues. Heroism, forsaking the active virtues, seemed to concentrate itself in the passive ones. The whole ethical world and its principles of valuation seemed now to be turned upside down, and men marvelled at its unwonted condition. Yet the strangeness of Christianity had something of native homeliness in it after all. It appealed to rich though disused faculties in its adversaries. And these disused and almost atrophied faculties on some occasions insisted on fraternizing with their nominal enemy. Legal authority might crucify Christ as a malefactor, but it could not prevent men from sympathizing with Him. In that darkest hour in the whole history of this sorrow-laden planet, the invincible and God-like meekness and love of Jesus were even then beginning their predestined triumph, and the secret inner thoughts of many hearts were at once unexpectedly and

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

startlingly revealed, when the Roman centurion and his companions cried aloud, with irrepressible and perhaps almost unwelcome conviction, " Truly this was the Son of God." Then indeed the Eternal Pity, incarnate in the noble heart of the great Galilean, had begun to conquer.

When Jesus, amidst His own horrible agonies, ministered tenderly to the repentant thief, and still more when He cried, " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," the old ethics of paganism were shaken down to their very foundations. Then began a new stage in the ethical and spiritual development of human life. The Roman centurion, and perhaps many other ignorant souls that witnessed the sufferings of Christ, became then a kind of advanced guard in that kingdom of sympathy which Tolstoy loved so well.

Christ did not forbid in His followers every kind of appeal to collective authority. The church or the congregation was practically to take the place of the forbidden courts of ordinary secular law. And thus a very real check was found for that extreme and lawless individualism which Tolstoy seems to have admired. The teaching of St Paul

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

was also in the same direction as that of His divine Master on this subject. He thought that Christians might rightly lay their grievances before a tribunal composed of their brethren, but that they ought not to lay them before unbelievers. He held that fellow-Christians were specially suited to judge concerning such grievances. He said: "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world; and, if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?" The apostle thought that Christians ought to be willing to suffer wrong at the hands of their brethren rather than to bring discredit on their religion by appealing to unbelievers. He said, "Now, therefore, there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" This advice given to his Corinthian converts by St Paul would not be entirely pleasing to Tolstoy.

The disciples of Christ appear to have learnt the lessons of their Master on this subject quite accurately. St John, the beloved disciple, evidently had his whole soul saturated with the universal

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

and penetrating benignity of his great leader and friend. The following sentences in his first Epistle make this manifest enough: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love. . . . Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. . . . If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. . . . Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." No one who studies the writings of St John can possibly doubt that the apostle believed firmly and with his whole soul in the constraining power of love, and in its vast superiority to force, harshness, or violence as an ethical and spiritual regenerating agency. This most benignant spirit knew well the marvellous attracting and uplifting power of genuine sympathy. He knew that only love can produce or evoke love. He disclosed to

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

us the whole rationale of spiritual persuasiveness and converting power when he declared, " We love Him, because He first loved us." What St John here said concerning God's method of attracting His creatures to Himself, is just as true when applied to the methods by which the soul of one human being draws another soul to itself. Sympathy or love is the true magnet for attracting stubborn hearts. The beloved disciple and the Russian moralist were completely in harmony on this matter. Both alike realized the truth that *force* is no remedy in the ethical and spiritual world.

St Peter also knew the mind of his much-loved Master on this important subject. In his earlier and harsher days he had to some extent believed in violence; but he had been reproved by his great leader, and had been taught that the best interests of religion cannot be served by the *sword* of earthly force. His mind was for ever haunted by the words of Jesus when He thus warned him: " Put up again thy sword into his place; for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Perhaps this warning means that force or violence spends

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

all its energies quickly, and then passes away, whereas gentleness and sympathetic persuasion exercise an *abiding* and ever-increasing influence over the spirits of men. In one passage contained in his first Epistle, St Peter speaks as if he were so impressed by the might of gentle and unresisting goodness as to suppose, like Tolstoy, that it would always, or at least usually, be safe from violence or harm. The following words might well have been written by the Russian advocate of complete non-resistance to evil: "And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?"

But then, as if correcting that statement as rather too optimistic, the apostle goes on to say, "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye, and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled."

Our Lord's apostles were very far from agreeing with Tolstoy in his repudiation of all external authority or ordinances. St Peter says plainly, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers,

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Nor did this apostle think that there ought to be no servants, as Tolstoy thought. He says, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward." It is evident that Tolstoy must have used his own expurgated version of the Bible.

What, we wonder, did our Lord mean when, at the very end of His career, as related by St Luke, He bid His followers provide themselves with swords? How can we reconcile this with the reproof of St Peter for using his sword? Both these apparently irreconcilable injunctions are said to have been given at about the same time, at the end of Christ's life on earth. "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one." Perhaps the best approximation to a solution of this difficulty is to suppose that Jesus did not wish *Himself* to be *personally* protected by earthly force or violence, whilst He was yet willing that, in time of persecution, His disciples should *for a time* protect themselves by swords. If they had all been killed,

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

there would have been none left to carry on the work begun by the Master. So, perhaps, the use of force, though *habitually* undesirable or wrong, might be considered expedient and right during the *special* dangers which our Lord perceived to be threatening His followers. As we have seen already, even the exaggerated teaching of Tolstoy is practically compelled to allow occasional exceptions with regard to the carrying out of its extremely exacting rules.

St James was to a great extent in harmony with the teaching of the Russian moralist as to force or violence. He exhorts his followers to be "slow to wrath," and declares that "the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God." He also shared to a great extent what we may call the humanitarian Radicalism of Tolstoy. He said, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect to persons. For, if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment, and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place,

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

and say to the poor, Stand thou here, or sit here under my footstool, are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him? "

St James also agreed with the Russian teacher with regard to swearing. He wrote thus: " But, above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by Heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath."

St Paul also preached that religion of gentleness and conciliation which Tolstoy so fervently advocated. And his doing this is all the more remarkable, because his own natural temperament was rather imperious, self-asserting, and domineering. He insisted on his rights as a Roman citizen, and at times he could speak with much personal bitterness towards his opponents. Yet he gradually learnt the gentleness and sweet reasonableness of his divine Master. In his writings he was always inculcating meekness, as if he " did smartingly feel " *his own* deficiencies. He said, " I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

Christ." When writing to the Galatians, he declared that "the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." And he besought his Ephesian followers to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." Nor was he willing that any harshness should be used towards weak souls that erred. He says to the Galatians, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

This naturally impetuous and forceful leader had no belief in violence as a remedy for moral and spiritual weakness. He expressed, for all time, the habitual thoughts of the wisest Christians when he declared that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." It would have been well for the Roman Catholic Church, as also for many other churches, if these wise

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

and pregnant words had been thoroughly understood and appreciated in their full and far-reaching significance. The history of Christianity would then have been far other than it has actually been. Tolstoy's noble and sympathetic soul was penetrated by this Pauline teaching. The apostle's natural fieriness of disposition was turned into ardent and tender sympathy by the wondrous influence of Jesus. And thus, "Out of the eater come forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness." The persecutor became a veritable incarnation of the most clinging pity and comprehending sympathy, so that he cried to his converts, "Who is weak, and I am not weak?" "I could wish myself accursed from Christ for my brethren." He ever sought to allure men to goodness rather than to frighten them out of their sins. Admiration for Jesus, and not fear of hell, was his habitual animating motive. So he truly said of himself and his most real followers, "The love of Christ constraineth us." *That* indeed was a kind of *constraint* which the intensely individualistic and lawless heart of the Russian moralist would ever welcome and love. Had Tolstoy stood

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

near St Paul when he put forth his glorious poem of all-embracing charity or sympathy, given to the world in his thirteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, the ardent and most loving spirit of the noble Russian would have been quite ready to exclaim, "This is the song, the immortal song that the Lord Almighty loves."

Yet in some other ways the Russian moralist was not in agreement with the teaching of the apostle to the Gentiles. The following verses in St Paul's Epistle to the Romans would not have pleased him: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Who-soever, therefore, resisted the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves condemnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil." Nor did the apostle agree with Tolstoy in holding that men ought not to pay taxes to the government. He said, "For this cause pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers."

St Paul was a great organizer or administrator. And so he knew the value of regularity and dis-

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

cipline which Tolstoy did not know. No struggling and persecuted church could have been held together by the methods of the Russian thinker.

On the whole, perhaps, we may sum up matters by saying that Christ and His earlier followers were entirely in agreement with Tolstoy as to the utter futility of *force* as a regenerating spiritual agent, but in direct conflict with him as regards orderliness, discipline, obedience, and organization. They clearly recognized the truth that, though each member of the spiritual body has its own proper function, it is necessary that each member should systematically co-operate with the others, and not set itself up as a separate entity. They knew well that the branch *cannot* bear fruit except it abide in the vine.

With regard to the *Old Testament*, of course we could not well expect to find such a clear and full revelation of the religion of love and sympathy as we find in the *New Testament*. Many of its precepts were given to men temporarily, because of the hardness of their hearts. They were not exact transcripts of the eternal verities of the spiritual world. Christ evidently thought that the Jewish

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

laws were far too stern and unforgiving. He would not have approved of the wholesale massacres of enemies in time of war. When Samuel hewed Agag in pieces, he was not acting in accordance with the highest eternal moral laws. The book of Leviticus breathes a fierce spirit completely out of harmony with Christianity. What Dr Martineau called the terrific volleys of curses in the book of Deuteronomy were as alien from the mind of Jesus as they are from that of Tolstoy. The earlier Jewish literature reveals to us a bellicose hardness, excusable in a people that was obliged to fight for its existence, but by no means admirable in itself.

Yet we are told that "the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." And it is manifest that gentleness was not entirely wanting in the domestic life of the Israelites. The Psalms are full of blessings of the meek. One great part of Israel's mission was to show to the world the strength of weakness, the abiding power of a gentle passiveness. The famous fifty-third chapter of Isaiah describes the mission of Israel amongst the nations of the world.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

Gazing on the persecuted and often helpless Jew, and realizing his mission to enrich the ethical and spiritual world by sorrow and suffering, the intellectual and joyous Greek and the stern and strong Roman might well exclaim, "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."

Moreover, the Hebrew prophets were at times filled with a spirit of wide-hearted sympathy, or philanthropy, greatly resembling that of Tolstoy. These detached, thoughtful, and observant souls perceived clearly enough that the harshness of Judaism was destined to be superseded by a gentler and nobler religion. In the book of Job the ethics of the eternal world are represented as triumphing over the transitional ethics of ordinary Judaism. The formulas of the current orthodoxy

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

are shown to be quite inadequate to meet the exigencies of fresh and strange experiences of actual life. Like the Psalmists, the prophets looked forward to a coming day when tenderness should infuse itself into moral severity, when men should be able to declare that "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." Amongst the greatest souls in Israel there appears to have been a deep longing for peace and the cessation of strife. They looked forward to a time in which they should be able to declare concerning their God, "He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; He burneth the chariot in the fire."

Tolstoy's favourite doctrine of the essential brotherhood of man as man was not wholly unknown to the finer spirits amongst the Israelites. Sometimes they gave a kindly and unsectarian glance to the needs of the Gentile world. And so one of them spoke thus of the coming admission of foreigners to the spiritual privileges of Israel: "And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising." The

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

broadest minds amongst the prophets looked for a day when the Gentiles should realize their outcast condition and seek initiation into the spiritual knowledge of the chosen people. Then might these benighted ones cry yearningly to the Eternal Pity, as the souls of so many outcasts and heretics have cried throughout the ages, "Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not."

Amongst their own people, at all events, the best Jewish moral teachers manifestly disapproved of universal and unending strife and competition, and longed for sympathetic co-operation. And so Isaiah wrote concerning a happy phase of the national life, "They helped everyone his neighbour, and everyone said to his brother, Be of good courage. So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith, and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil." And the same prophet declared plainly that the essence of true religion consisted in pity and benevolence, and not in any external ceremonies. He wrote thus to those who over-valued the mere rind of religion: "*Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to loose the bands*

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh." There is much Tolstoyan religion in this famous passage.

The incipient humanitarianism and universal sympathy, for so long to a great extent only latent in Jewish religion, find their most explicit manifestation in these words of the Prophet Malachi, words which had perhaps a far wider range of application than the speaker was aware of: "Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?" These ancient words might almost have been addressed by the modern Russian prophet to his own people and to the world collectively. They give expression to the very essence of Tolstoy's religion. They are quite *peculiarly* suited to set forth his most characteristic ethical teaching, and also what he conceived to be its indispensable *religious* foundation.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

In his book called *The Kingdom of God is within You*, the Russian moralist explains that his ethical and religious teaching is radically different from that of Positivists and secular humanitarians. It postulates the Fatherhood of God as an indispensably necessary foundation for the true brotherhood of man. Tolstoy denies that we can love humanity apart from God. He says "The Christian doctrine, and the doctrine of the Positivists, and of all advocates of the universal brotherhood of man, founded on the utility of such a brotherhood, have nothing in common, and especially do they differ in that the doctrine of Christianity has a solid and a clearly-defined foundation in the human soul, whereas love of humanity is but a theoretical conclusion reached through analogy."

He also declared that "The Christian doctrine teaches the man that the essence of his soul is love; that his well-being may be traced, not to the fact that he loves this object or that one, but to the fact that he loves the principle of all things—God, whom he recognizes in himself through love, and will by the love of God love all men and all things."

Tolstoy here writes as a confirmed mystic, as a

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

kind of " God-intoxicated " teacher, or as a kind of Malebranche in the ethical world. Malebranche, the philosopher, thought that we *see* all things in God: Tolstoy thought that we ought to *feel and love* all things in God.

Curiously enough, we find that Goldwin Smith, writing from an utterly agnostic point of view, agrees with the Russian moralist in thinking it very questionable whether the brotherhood of man is a real and solid fact apart from all religious ideas. He expressed his doubts on this subject in his interesting book called *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*. On the other hand, George Eliot appeared to believe that in a godless world, wherein men should feel that they are orphans and devoid of all hope of a future life, the finest souls might feel an *increased* sense of brotherhood, a deeper pity and love for their sorrowful fellows. Perhaps this might be so *for a time*; but we are convinced that *in the end* hopelessness would cause a sort of emotional apathy which would necessarily tend to lessen the keenness of sympathy. In a certain sense we believe that Tolstoy was right, though not quite in the way that he understood

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

matters. Faith in God, as the undying source of all love, *does* greatly tend to vivify and invigorate our love for His creatures. Increased *hope* for our fellows does tend to bring with it increased admiration, sympathy, and love for them. Men viewed as the sons of God destined to unending moral and spiritual progress are certainly more interesting and more worth living for than men viewed as the products of chance with no *abiding* spiritual significance. We cannot love animals as we love souls.

In his later mystical stage of development Tolstoy appears to be far too much inclined to despise the day of small things. Having climbed up to a great height, he looks down rather too disdainfully on the ordinary plains of the moral and spiritual world. He was much less *wise* than St John, who clearly recognized the truth that, for all ordinary people, love for man whom we have seen is developed earlier than love for God whom we have not seen.

The book called *The Kingdom of God is within You* was written when the Russian teacher was far advanced in rather unintelligible mysticism. It

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

seems to contradict flatly what has been said in this essay as to his earlier views with regard to the true method of arriving at well-grounded religious faith. He now seems to repudiate entirely that undeveloped Pragmatism which, consciously or unconsciously, guided his mind at an earlier stage. Having started from the *instinct to live* and to find a meaning in life, our philosopher now destroys the stepping-stones which he found so useful in former years, and, standing on a supposed mountain of vision, bids struggling pilgrims take to themselves wings and fly up to him in the rarefied air. Having, as he thought, found God, he proceeded to depreciate man and his more ordinary faculties, just as Carlyle very unfairly sought to humiliate man by comparing him with God. Mysticism certainly tended to diminish philanthropy in the mind of the Russian moralist, or, at all events, to impair its inner nature. Men like to be loved *for their own sakes*. + Tolstoy in his later years seemed to be willing to love them only for the sake of God. The underlying philosophy of this partially dehumanizing mysticism is really a misleading one. God is not jealous. He is quite willing

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

that we should gradually learn to love His supreme and concentrated spiritual glory by first loving its reflection in the works of Nature and in the souls of His creatures. Tolstoy's later mysticism seems in some ways almost like the old Calvinism, which *opposed* love for the creature to love for the Creator, as if the works of God were in no degree expressive of His real mind and character. This view seems to us both false and religiously injurious. It cannot be deemed really rational. If God purposely incarnated a very large portion of His ethical and spiritual nature in the person of Christ as a human being, it does not seem likely that He wishes us to ignore His perpetual incarnation, to a less extent, in the noblest souls of the human race.

Amongst the ancient Greeks and Romans we do not find much in harmony with Tolstoy's teaching as to complete non-resistance to evil—though an ancient sage declared that *pardon* is often more remedial than punishment. The Romans in the old days were essentially believers in force and regularity. And amongst the Greeks humility and gentleness were reckoned amongst the lower

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

virtues. Yet some of the old Stoics here and there in their teaching remind us a little of the Russian reformer. Perhaps also the marvellous and admirable friendships amongst the Greeks helped to cultivate gentleness, tenderness, and self-effacement to a considerable extent. It is also clear that Plato appreciated these softer and milder qualities of human nature. He tells us that the gaoler who had charge of Socrates in his last hours was greatly touched by the extreme gentleness of his prisoner. And in his great dialogue called the " Republic," Socrates is represented as steadfastly opposing the rough and violent Thrasymachus who contended that might is right, and that the strong are entitled to oppress the weak. In the portrait which Plato gives us of Socrates, calmness, serenity, and what Matthew Arnold called sweet reasonableness are very striking features. *Even in arguments* he was much opposed to anything like blustering or bullying.

On the other hand, it is tolerably plain that Aristotle did not really much care for meekness. The proud strut of his " high-minded " man would be far more pleasing to Nietzsche than to Tolstoy.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

Coming now to what we may vaguely call the middle ages of the world's history, it seems at first sight as if there was almost nothing at that time in harmony with Tolstoy's views as to meekness and absolute non-resistance. But a more careful inspection of the best thought and practice of that period discloses to us some faint indications of a coming kingdom of gentleness, sympathy, and love. Even during the almost complete reign of violence, the feelings and the institutions of what was called chivalry offered a kind of protest against the absolute and unrestrained dominance of brute force. To some extent it was even then recognized that the strong have obligations to the weak. The old maxim that "*Noblesse oblige*" shows this. Aristocrats are often far more friendly to the lower class than many of our modern plutocrats. Gentlemanness, as an ideal, certainly has in it some valuable ethical elements which we do not always find amongst the rich middle class. It implies much consideration for those beneath one and a kind of refined shrinking from hurting their feelings.

Moreover, it is evident that the great Catholic Church, though in some ways cruel and persecuting,

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

really did a good deal to promote pity, gentleness, and tenderness. It preached self-restraint, love for the poor and suffering, and also self-sacrificing devotion to the cause of benevolence. True monks were obliged to be humble. Probably self-effacement was scarcely ever learnt more thoroughly than it was by some devout Catholics in the Middle Ages. The souls of Thomas à Kempis and of St Francis of Assisi were in some ways very near to the soul of Christ. The beautiful humility of the former and the radiant geniality and all-embracing tenderness of the latter offer us a strong and most pleasing contrast to the violence of the lay world and the fierce intolerance of the ordinary clerical world. Even in the case of the bitter and scornful Dante, some exquisite passages of pitying tenderness in his *Purgatorio* do a great deal to counteract the harsh and abominable horrors of his *Inferno*. The divine love did not leave itself entirely unrepresented even during the long reign of violence and force.

The worship of the Virgin Mary also helped greatly to mitigate the harshness of that age. Christ had then been almost dehumanized. The

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

stern Judge had taken the place of the Good Shepherd in the regnant theology of the time. But men worshipped pity, tenderness, mildness, and mercy as incarnate in the Mother of Christ. The worship of the Virgin Mary was an ethical and spiritual necessity in those days of violent forcefulness and cruelty. Only thus could the best and most vitally characteristic elements of the religion of Jesus be preserved.

Coming down to a later age, we find ordinary Protestantism very deficient in the best elements of Tolstoy's religion. As Dr Edward Caird (the Master of Balliol) wisely remarked, "Protestantism has been for the most part a *Judaized* Christianity, whilst Catholicism has been for the most part a paganized Christianity." In many ways Calvinism was harsher and more inhuman than Catholicism. The Elect were reckoned by it as the only really important people in the world. The non-elect were mere dross. The division between these two classes of men was as harsh as the old division between Greeks and barbarians. Undoubtedly Calvinism had some advantages for the moulding of human character. It made men

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

strong, self-reliant, confident, and energetic, but it inevitably tended to wither the softer and gentler feelings of humanity. A stern conception of God produced stern men. Tolstoy would have detested Calvin, both for his bad qualities and for his good ones.

However, in some cases, the original fineness and tenderness of men's souls preserved their gentleness and mildness, notwithstanding the hardening influence of their formal creeds. The saintly Archbishop Leighton, Calvinist though he was to some extent, would have charmed the heart of Tolstoy. Concerning him it was said that his rebukes were so gentle to his servants when they did wrong, that they seldom repeated their offences, not because they were *afraid* to do so, but because they were *ashamed* to do so. The Quakers also anticipated much of Tolstoy's teaching.

In modern times we meet with many widely-scattered fore-gleams of Tolstoyan religion in many varied departments of life. These early gleams of pity and tenderness were often found even amongst the horrors of war. Tolstoyan ethics

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

were sometimes found exercising a real influence even amidst the fiercest strife. In *long* wars men appear to have felt instinctively that there *must* be interludes of brotherhood and almost of personal affection. And so Wellington's soldiers often fraternized with French soldiers in a quite marvellous way. The hostile officers were often courteous and friendly to each other. And, even in that Division in which discipline was most sternly enforced—even in the celebrated Light Division—the private soldiers often took the liberty of making temporary comrades or friends of French soldiers. During a temporary cessation of hostilities in the Peninsular War, a soldier of the 95th Rifles thus describes the way in which nominally hostile soldiers fraternized with each other: "All this time, and for a great part of that in which we were quartered here, a very friendly intercourse was carried on between the French and ourselves. We frequently met them bathing in the Rio Mayor, and would as often have swimming and even jumping matches. In these games, however, we mostly beat them; but that was attributed perhaps to their half-starved and distressed

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

condition. This our stolen intercourse soon made us aware of, until at length, touched with pity, our men went so far as to share with them the ration biscuits which we were regularly supplied with from England. Indeed we buried all national hostility in our anxiety to assist and relieve them. Tobacco was in great request; we used to carry some of ours to them, while they in return would bring us a little brandy."

This narrative would have cheered the heart of the Russian reformer.

Even in those old days, when the punishments inflicted on soldiers were almost incredibly severe, when a sentence of five hundred lashes was quite an ordinary one, the greater officers to a considerable extent realized the truth that force is not an entirely adequate remedy for disobedience and lawlessness. And so Sir John Moore made many appeals to the men's sense of patriotism and to their better feelings in general. And many other officers followed the example of Moore. On one occasion that excellent officer, Sir William Napier, acted towards one of his men in a way that Tolstoy would have greatly admired. A rather lawless and

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

wild Irish private had been sentenced to receive a great number of lashes, but Napier let him off, partly because a battle was then imminent, and still more because he thought that the erring man had some fine qualities. When the battle came on, Napier tells us that this wild soldier showed his gratitude by perpetually thrusting his own huge body between his forgiving officer and the bullets of the enemy. And so it is evident enough that this Tolstoyan mildness of Sir William Napier was wise and amply justified. Yet, long after the Peninsular War, the colder-hearted Wellington was not ashamed to declare that he had not much hope of any improvement in the character of the British soldier except from his fear of corporal punishment.

At the end of his marvellous career, the great Napoleon seems to have been struck with a feeling of the superiority of moral force to that of physical in securing *permanent* influence over mankind. In the solitude of his imprisonment and in view of death, he is said to have freely expressed his opinion on this subject. He said that he had been accustomed to put before himself the examples of

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

Alexander and Cæsar, but that he now perceived how extremely slight was the mark that they had left on the world, when compared with the abiding and most penetrating influence of Christ. Napoleon's final conclusion was that Christ must be a divine being, and not merely a man. Perhaps, even then, the great earthly warrior scarcely understood one of the chief sources of the abiding influence of Jesus. Perhaps he did not quite adequately realize the fact that his own empire, like those of Alexander and Cæsar, had been founded almost entirely on violence, whereas the empire of Jesus was founded on reason, persuasion, sympathy, and love. The followers of Christ displayed an absolutely unswerving loyalty to their master, which the followers of Napoleon did not always show. In his *Grammar of Assent*, Cardinal Newman gives us a quite marvellous account of the strange alacrity and even joy with which the Christian martyrs welcomed the most horrible torments for the sake of the Lord whom they loved. Assuredly Newman was right in considering Gibbon's reasons to account for the spread of Christianity very inadequate. That historian

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

knew not the almost incredible might of the noblest human devotion and love.

Tolstoy would not agree with Napoleon as to the divine nature of Christ. It seems rather strange that the *less* the Russian thinker believed in the divinity of Jesus, the *more* he believed in His *moral* infallibility. He stripped Christ of very much that was supposed to constitute His authority, and yet he demanded from men the most exact and literal obedience to every jot and tittle of His ethical precepts. But in some ways he seemed to care more for the teaching than for the Master who gave that teaching. Nor did he scruple to ignore other large portions of the doctrines of Christ which were not directly connected with the Sermon on the Mount. In fact, we might almost say that he only followed Christ when his teaching appeared to be an anticipation of Tolstoyan wisdom. He would not allow the divine Galilean to preach personal immortality, though to careful and unprejudiced students it is plain enough that this doctrine was an absolutely essential portion of His message to mankind.

In his later years Tolstoy became quite bigoted

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

and unfair towards orthodoxy and towards any thing *approaching* to orthodoxy. In his book called *The Kingdom of God is within You*, he says: "The Sermon on the Mount or the Nicene Creed; the one excludes the other. If a man sincerely believes the Sermon on the Mount, the Nicene Creed must inevitably lose all its meaning for him." This oracular utterance is really absurd. Amongst other things, the Nicene Creed proclaims the Fatherhood of God, and *that* has a direct connection with the Sermon on the Mount, and is, according to Tolstoy himself, the indispensable foundation of the brotherhood of man. Here, as on many other occasions, the Russian philosopher speaks far too rashly and inaccurately. What he really *meant* to say probably was that, if we accept the full significance of the Sermon on the Mount, we cannot consistently make *acceptance* of the Nicene Creed an *indispensable condition* of salvation. With this underlying meaning of Tolstoy all liberal religious thinkers would agree, though they some of them value the Nicene Creed as teaching the spiritual union of Christ with God.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

Tolstoy's opinion, that those who accept the Nicene Creed *cannot* really care for the Sermon on the Mount, is contradicted by facts, and it is about as absurd as the monstrous declaration of Cotter Morison, that "all Christians agree in vilipending a moral life." In both cases alike *experience* convinces us of the folly of the statement given to us. Did Thomas Arnold of Rugby, Frederick Denison Maurice, and Bishop Westcott care nothing for the Sermon on the Mount? Does Canon Scott Holland care nothing for it? Did the saintly Dr King, the late Bishop of Lincoln, entirely disregard it? No doubt this Bishop's religious *opinions* were very narrow in some respects; but it is notorious that his heart was overflowing with tenderness and the most Christ-like compassion for sinners and for the sufferings of mankind. Emotionally this gentle prelate was very near to Christ, though he did hold many untenable opinions on abstract questions. St Paul declared plainly that it is "with the *heart* that man believeth unto righteousness."

The only excuse that we can find for Tolstoy's narrow and bigoted teaching on this subject is

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

to be found in the fact that his ideas as to orthodox or semi-orthodox Christianity were mostly derived from contemplation of the exceedingly corrupt and superstitious orthodox church in Russia. When applied to the finer minds and souls in Great Britain, his remarks are at once seen to be ridiculous and very uncharitable.

Finally, we now come to the discussion of the question whether there are any indications in the present age of the coming triumph of Tolstoy's doctrine of complete non-resistance to evil. The prophet himself saw many significant signs of these, and to a great extent it really seems that he was right, and that Carlyle's moral methods of reforming men were wrong. We do not believe that the principles of the Russian moralist will ever be *completely* triumphant in this world; but we *do* seem *already* to perceive many tokens of their coming partial victory. Let us proceed to look for these signs.

In the first place, civilized nations *do* really appear to be learning to shrink from war, as they did not shrink in earlier ages. They are now willing to submit to arbitration some quarrels

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

or differences of opinion which would inevitably have led to war in former days. The immensely increased destructive power of modern weapons of war has caused men to realize more adequately what must be the horrors of war in our time. An increase of humanity has also caused most men to detest the unavoidable cruelty and sufferings of war. In this direction is to be found our chief ground for hopes of lasting peace in the world. The Sermon on the Mount has sunk down into men's hearts more effectively than it formerly did. During the last Boer War, when men were burying the dead of both the hostile armies, some of the Boer leaders expressed to an excellent British chaplain their deep sense of the incompatibility of war and its horrors with real Christianity. This feeling seems likely to grow and spread throughout the Christian world. And it is very much *needed*; for, strange to say, whilst humanity has really increased, the sense of *honour and fairness* between nations appears not to have increased at all. Whilst *cruelty* is now hated more than it used to be hated, *treachery*, on the part of one nation to another, seems to be

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

thought quite natural and almost justifiable. Men do not seem to be at all shocked at the prospect of one nominally Christian nation making a sudden and unprovoked attack on another in time of profound peace and without any preliminary disputes.

Turning now to our own domestic life, we seem to find many indications of belief that force or violence is not the most efficient means of promoting permanent welfare. *Mad* people are no longer treated with the old brutal and utterly stupid violence. Our ordinary laws in civilian life are far milder than in former days, and we perceive clearly that they are also more effective. In the army we have abolished the old habit of flogging soldiers, and we know that the discipline of the army is now far better than it was. In our prisons, also, we have abandoned to a great extent our old brutal methods. Charles Reade, the novelist, did a whole world of good by showing the utter futility of the old cruel way of dealing with prisoners. But there is still much room for improvement in the management of our ~~gals~~ ^{gaols}. Solitary confinement is eminently calculated to

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

make offenders worse rather than better. The methods of mere repression are now being discredited. We are gradually learning that we cannot really improve the characters of sinners by tormenting them. Yet we still retain to some extent the abominable custom of depriving some prisoners of adequate sleep by refusing to allow them tolerably comfortable beds. This custom is more worthy of Chinese cruelty than of Christian wisdom.

But, on the whole, the discipline of our prisons is gradually becoming milder and more rational. We are slowly learning that it is unwise to treat men as brutes, if we wish to reform their characters. The wise ideas set forth in that noble story, *It is Never too Late to Mend*, are at last being generally received. We are beginning to perceive that considerate treatment and some measure of real sympathy are indispensably necessary as agents in moral regeneration. Instruction is slowly taking the place of irrational violence. Our gaols are to a considerable extent being turned into training schools, instead of remaining places for merely vindictive punish-

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

ment. We are beginning to recognize the truth that we ought to aim at sending offenders out of prisons morally better than they were when they were cast into them.

In education, also, the old violent methods are gradually being abandoned. We are beginning to perceive that beating boys is by no means the best way of educating them. Many thoughtful people now agree with an eminent English statesman in holding that corporal punishments might very well be abolished in our schools. Boys *in the army* are generally managed without any corporal punishments. So it is difficult to see why boys in the upper and middle classes should need to be flogged. Many wise people now feel strongly on this subject. The more we reflect, the more evident it appears that flogging ought to be given up in our schools. Great educators might well join with great religious teachers in declaring, "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal." In order that education may be of the best sort, in order that it may expand all the higher faculties of boys, and give them a real liking for things admirable and noble, a very large amount

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

of personal sympathy between those teaching and those being taught seems absolutely necessary. Boys cannot be flogged into a real appreciation of the best literature and the grandest heroism. Unquestionably they learn best from those whom they like personally. And, in the case of the more sensitive boys, it seems almost impossible that they should feel sympathy and affection for masters who use violence towards them. In former days masters used to flog boys, in many cases, because they were too idle to take the trouble to persuade them. But it is now evident enough that persuasion is, in the long run, far more permanently effective than any kind of violence. The results of persuasion are *lasting*, whereas the results of irrational compulsion are essentially transient.

 In the *religious* world it is still more evident that Tolstoyan ideas are becoming very much more prevalent than they were. And this fact is *especially* significant, because, when a man's religion is *real*, and not a mere form, it is a kind of summing up of his *whole nature*, a sort of condensed statement of his whole attitude to-

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

wards life and its meaning, with all its joys and sorrows, and with all its various problems. If one truly knows what a man's *real* religion is, one can to a great extent infer what his views must be as to politics, art, literature, friendship, and the general courses of human life.

Now it certainly does seem quite clear that the mildness and gentleness of the Russian moralist have infused themselves into the best religion of our time. The most deeply spiritual natures of this age are far more genial and far mellower than almost any of those of earlier times. The God whom the wiser minds now worship is really, and no longer only nominally, a God of Love. The finest souls have banished the old nightmare horror of a cruel and vindictive Deity. They have discovered that he never existed independently, that he was but a hideous creation of men's own barbarity and cruelty. Gazing into the stern, unrelenting, and almost petrifying face of this appalling phantom, the disciples of the real Jesus have dared to disparage its old futile method of overcoming the evil of human weakness by the still greater evil of irrational violence, and,

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

reproaching it for the utter failure implied in its eternal and over-crowded hell, these gentle but intrepid souls have ventured to address to it the warning words of the great apostle to the Gentiles, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

Tolstoy was assuredly quite right in disparaging the old coarse religion of violence and fear. In their most inspired hours the best of the ancient Hebrew prophets perceived the transiency of the religion of terror. They knew that the Lord was not in the fierce wind or the earthquake of terror and alarm, but in the "still, small voice" of sympathetic persuasion and love. Their denunciations themselves were full of repressed tenderness. They were fine innuendoes as to the splendid potentialities of human nature. They were as a trumpet-call to a noble warfare. The apparent bitterness of the prophets was essentially the passing bitterness of disappointed and baffled appreciation and affection. They were ashamed of man, chiefly because they knew his possible greatness. Hence came their abrupt and often startlingly rapid changes from fierce storms of

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

apparently implacable reproach to bursts of the most clinging, impassioned, and inexhaustible love, as though the great eternal fountains of the divine tenderness had broken through all barriers, and now poured themselves irrepressibly into every corner of man's desolate and sorrowing life. The absoluteness and the unchanging nature of the divine love were at times manifested to the greater Hebrew prophets in all their grandeur and fulness. At times these prophets perceived a kind of sorrowful plaintiveness and reproachfulness in the love of the Father, as if the Infinite Pity and Love scarcely cared to live without their children, as if they even then yearned to incarnate themselves in the good Shepherd who gave His life for the wandering sheep.

The great Russian would have loved the best of the Hebrew prophets in their hours of lofty inspiration. He would have been delighted to see death and hell and vindictive anger swallowed up in the victory of the divine love. He would have fully appreciated the wise tenderness of words like these: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you"; "Can a

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee"; "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel."

Considering how the churches have perverted the messages of real religion, perhaps Tolstoy might have said that, though God *wished* to be as the *dew* unto all man's weak and struggling higher faculties, orthodox divines have often represented Him as a harsh, bitter, parching, and destroying east wind to those faculties.

In reality, the generosity of God is a far more effective means of saving men's souls than any amount of grudging severity. As St Paul declared, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The immortal parable of the Prodigal Son is full of suggestiveness and true spiritual and moral insight. And it is entirely in harmony with Tolstoy's conception of religion. The weapons of the injured father were not forcible or carnal.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

His weakness was his strength. The fact that the son knew his father's weakness, knew that he could not do without him, constituted the true strength of the father's position. Pathos pierces the hearts of thousands of sinners who are not much moved by threats or denunciations. The love of Christ is a mightier regenerating power than the fear of hell. Full and free forgiveness touches the wilder sort of sinners more, and penetrates more deeply into the secret recesses of their hearts, than any amount of rigidly just punishment. Hopefulness and loving gratitude lead to the very best sort of repentance. There are many who resist what they imagine to be the wrath of God, whilst they are yet incapable of resisting the pity of God. Age after age, sinful hearts might well express their inmost thoughts and feelings in these old words of the prophet Micah: "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again; He will have compassion upon us; He will subdue our

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

iniquities; and Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

Great indeed is the power of comprehending pity and wise interpretation to themselves of men's own hearts. In order to *understand* human nature, it is necessary first to sympathize with it. Men do not disclose their deepest inmost feelings to the harsh and the unsympathetic, so that, whilst love is working moral miracles, harshness or violence, whether regnant in religion or in the management of our ordinary prisons, is obliged to be content with failure, and to cry, in its old futile and despairing way, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still." As the Bible declares, it is the "gentleness" of God which makes men great, and the gentleness of man is the most efficient co-operator with God in His divine work for the human race. Physicians of the soul might learn much wisdom from physicians of the *body* in this age. In physiology and medicine, as understood by the best practitioners, what we may call Tolstoyan ideas are now regnant. Wise doctors, when dealing with corporeal diseases, now seek to assist nature and not to thwart or suppress it.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

And the best physicians of the soul are gradually learning to act in a similar manner with moral and spiritual diseases. Neither bodies nor souls are usually now bled to death in the old violent way. We are discovering that sin often arises from sheer weakness of volitional energy, for which force is certainly no remedy.

Tolstoy would have agreed cordially with Charles Kingsley who declared that the religion of terror is the most superficial of all religions. It makes men sorry that they are going to be punished, but not sorry for their own baseness and meanness. There is nothing admirable or even distinctively human in that sort of sorrow. Even dogs are sorry that they are going to be punished. And the effects of religious terror are essentially transitory.

If the Russian moralist had known the best religious teaching in Great Britain, he would have gladly recognized the fact that the old religion of violence is rapidly being superseded by a religion of reason and sympathy; and so his very low opinion of the churches would have been much modified. In the Church of England, in the more

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

liberal Dissenting Churches, and in the Scottish Established Church, and the United Free Church, the best minds have already renounced the old coarse religion of terror. The Sermon on the Mount—which was so dear to Tolstoy—together with the parable of the Prodigal Son, and of the Good Shepherd, and of the Good Samaritan, now constitutes the vital essence of the teaching of the more liberal thinkers in these churches. And this teaching is now congenial to the great majority of laymen of all classes. Simple people, no less than the highly-educated, now very much prefer this more genial religion. The appalling picture of future punishment given in Baxter's *Saint's Everlasting Rest* would now utterly disgust the overwhelming majority of those who go to church, and so would some dreadful passages in Spurgeon's sermons. The best thinkers in the Church of England now find themselves completely out of harmony with the harsh curses of the Athanasian Creed, and with our thoroughly Judaic Communion Service, which appears to teach that God cannot or will not show mercy and justice at the same time to the same people. And in Scotland

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

the most prominent thinkers and preachers now find much that they cannot entirely accept in their old Confession of Faith.

In these days we also find that the religion of mildness, reasonableness, and sympathy is the only one that really suits simple and unlearned people. The writer of this essay has spent a very considerable portion of each year, during the last quarter of a century, in voluntarily helping various chaplains and acting chaplain to look after soldiers and to preach to them. And he has invariably found that the religion of sympathy is the only one to which soldiers gladly listen. They dislike intensely the old religion of threats. Sermons full of damnation simply repel them. Half-consciously or unconsciously they appear to argue in some such way as this: If the preacher tells us that we are going to suffer horrible torments for ever, he must think that we *deserve* such torments; and, if we deserve such torments, he must think that we are very horrible fellows; and, if he thinks that we are very horrible fellows, he must *dislike* us; and, if he dislikes us, we do not care for him, and we are not going to listen to him.

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

Soldiers instinctively feel that the very severe and denunciatory preachers do not really *understand* them, and so that their warnings and advice are worthless. On the other hand, a very large number of soldiers listen both attentively and gladly to the advice of broad-minded and sympathetic preachers. The present writer once heard some of the men in a well-known cavalry regiment say to a preacher of that sort, "We do like hearing *your* sermons, for you always give us another chance, and you are never hard on us." A prominent English general once said that the sermons best suited to soldiers are those which contain plenty of sympathy and not too much doctrine.

The advent of a milder and more sympathetic religion is sure to bring with it eventually a salutary change in men's ordinary daily life. The wiser teaching will gradually sink down into the thoughts and feelings of secular life. In our days the best, most human, and broadest religion offers a kind of unsectarian and hospitable temple, into which men take their various moral idealisms, in order that they may be consecrated and

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

strengthened. All that is best and most valuable in daily life finds new and strong inspiration in such temples. Wide-hearted benevolence, justice, sympathy, friendship, and affection are all quickened into fuller vitality by broad religion. This religion breathes into them the power of an endless life. It infuses into their finiteness some of the life-blood of the Infinite. It touches to fine issues many glorious capacities hitherto dormant. It gives them a force of persistency and recuperation which they otherwise would not have.

When men truly receive the religion of gentleness and sympathy, they will gradually learn to carry it out in their daily lives. And so men's ordinary existence will be greatly changed. The old distrust between different classes, now so widely prevalent, will gradually pass away. Working men now go on strike because they think that their employers are unjust to them. But when the time comes in which workmen will believe that their employers are profoundly desirous to act fairly and sympathetically towards them, and in which employers will believe that their workmen are filled with the same spirit of fairness and

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

sympathy, fierce disputes leading to strikes will cease. Co-operation, on a large scale and in varied forms, will then mitigate greatly the old horrible and selfish struggle for existence. Such co-operation would naturally follow the reception of Tolstoy's religion.

The most real merit of the Russian reformer, as a thinker, is to be found in the fact that he perceived clearly that the course of merely *physical* evolution is well-nigh ended in this planet, and that the future is with *moral* evolution. Though Tolstoy was apt to exaggerate, he did see clearly the trend of the best modern thought. He also perceived what must be the *power* which could enable that thought to translate itself into efficient and permanent action. His vision into the nature and the wants of man was keen and penetrating. He saw that, at the present stage of man's long pilgrimage, a *change of guides* is necessary. He saw that *merely natural* selection was no longer adequate to secure progress. He saw that the self-regarding struggle for existence had virtually done its work. He saw that the stern preparatory Baptist must make way for

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

the Messiah of gentleness. He perceived that selfishness had become folly, that, at the present stage of development, God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the strong.

The great Russian saw plainly the *direction* in which the best ethical thoughts and life of our age must move. But he was rather too impatient, and his precipitation might, in the long run, have very much retarded the progress that he desired. So long as there are tyrants and bullies in the world, it is *necessary* that they should be actively resisted. Even for *their own sake* these tyrants and bullies ought to be resisted. If not resisted, they would grow worse. It is only at a later stage of their development that meekness and gentleness would effectively appeal to them. They must be resisted first, and only afterwards instructed in the way of God more perfectly. But we believe that a day will come in which the tyrants and bullies of the world will, for the most part, have learnt the folly of their old coarse violence. And then at last the precepts of Tolstoy can be almost universally carried out. We believe that *some* evil and some violence will

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

always be found in this world; but we also believe that they will be enormously reduced in amount, so that Tolstoyan saints will practically reign. We believe that these saints will never in this world find the true city of God in all its unstained moral splendour; but we also believe that these aspiring pilgrims may hereafter approach very near to that true home of elect souls. We believe that, even on earth, they may find the land of Beulah, or roam freely over the "delectable mountains," as they draw nigh to that blessed land.

And, after all, we are compelled to own that it is to these aspiring, ambitious, and rather too sanguine spirits that the world owes the greatest debt. Theirs is the *faith* that removes mountains of difficulties, the faith that "overcomes the world" with all its stagnant inertness, all its timid despondency, and all its materialistic unbelief in the noblest moral ideals. It is because the prophets of God even now "behold the land that is very far off," that we weak ones obtain courage to follow them slowly in their triumphant career. *Pioneers* must be confident, or they could not do

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

their best work. Greathearts must to some extent underrate difficulties. Their immense, precocious, and almost excessive faith is needed to stimulate our faltering faith. A faith in the final and complete victory of goodness, such as was that of Browning and Tolstoy, is a great gift from God to His weaker children. And it is essentially grand and heroic. It is well worthy of the utmost admiration and love. It reminds one of the faith of that undaunted Roman who is said to have purchased at its full price a field of his country on which the aggressive and victorious Carthaginian hosts were then encamped. All honour be to those great souls, which, even in the very darkest hour, face the forces of evil and cruelty with unflinching confidence and invincible courage. Let us hope that, in the spiritual world, the scarred soul of Leo Tolstoy may not be *ultimus Romanorum*. Let us hope that his mantle may fall on some genuine successors.

Plato thought that a kind of sublime madness is often an indispensable condition of divine inspiration. The spiritual vision of the greatest prophets is often confused, perplexing, and to

Religion and Ethics of Tolstoy

some extent inconsistent or at least incoherent. Great religious teachers are *possessed* by certain elevated thoughts. Some noble ideal seems to speak to each of them as God is said to have spoken to Pharaoh, saying, "In very deed, for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee My power." Necessity is laid upon them to preach a new gospel which they only partially comprehend. The minds of God-intoxicated thinkers often seem for a time ill-balanced. Yet are they the world's best regenerators. Leo Tolstoy might have said with St Paul, "Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God; or, whether we be sober, it is for your cause."

THE PERSONALITY OF GOD

II

PERHAPS it may be well to consider the objections made by some to our ascribing personality to God. In some of his moods Tolstoy appears to have sympathized with these objections, though in other moods he used language which certainly *implies* the divine personality.

The common objection is that personality implies limitation, whilst God can have no limitation. In one passage of his writings Tolstoy definitely sanctions this teaching.

This argument seems to suggest that those who defend the doctrine of the personality of God consider His personality to be *just like ours*, and also that they consider it an *adequate* description of God. Both these suggestions are erroneous. No thoughtful person supposes that God's personality is just like ours. It must, in the nature of things, be widely different from ours. What Theists

The Personality of God

maintain is that God must have intellect, character, and will, though all these qualities are and must be very different in an infinite being from what they are in finite beings. If Spinoza, when denying intellect to God, only meant that He has no intellect *just like ours*, we may well agree with him. But if he meant that God has nothing even faintly resembling human intellect, we are compelled to differ from him.

Herbert Spencer declared that it is absurd to attribute consciousness, intelligence, or will to the Creator; but all that he really *proved* is that these qualities cannot be just like the same qualities in us. A sort of modified Pantheism enables us to a great extent to answer Spencer's arguments. The immanence of God in the whole creation does away with many of the objections of our opponent. No seriality or limitation is needed to constitute the divine intelligence, because this intelligence is diffused throughout the whole universe, at once filling it and transcending it. God is, as it were, the all-pervading soul of the universe. To Him there is no beginning and no ending. He is the basis of everything that exists. He is at once, in

The Personality of God

some sense, the perceiver and the thing perceived. Probably the need for some alien or external activity, to evoke distinct consciousness of personality, is an infirmity of our finite nature, and not of the essence of conscious personality as such.

When we ascribe personality to God, we are not attempting to give anything approaching to a full or adequate description of His Being. Nor do we care to fight over mere words. We believe that God is *far more* than we are able to conceive, "the nameless thought, the super-personal heart." But we refuse to believe that God can possibly be *below* personality or devoid of the best qualities which we find in His creatures. We believe that the highest things in man are faint adumbrations of eternal realities, "shadows of good things to come, and not the very images." All sane theories of the universe imply the Unknowable in the background. Atheists cannot possibly escape from the inherent mysteriousness of the universe. The thick darkness of the primal mystery broods over *all* our provisional explanations. Yet we maintain that some of these explanations are more probable

The Personality of God

and more *approximately* true than others. We cannot explain *how* God can have intellect, character, and will; but we still believe that, in some inconceivable way, He really has them.

Critics like Matthew Arnold argue as if *all* the difficulties were on the side of Theism, and none on the side of Atheism or utter Agnosticism. But this way of arguing is extremely misleading. Atheists are compelled to be extremely credulous if they make any attempt to defend or explain their theories. They often seem powerful when attacking Theism; but they are extremely weak in defending their own proposed substitutes for Theism. Their theory implies that the effect is greater than its own cause, that men are wiser and morally better than their Creator, that the universe has brought forth a son greater than itself. The *miracles* of Atheistic unbelief are stupendous and quite incredible. Chance, as a cause, cannot bear the weight which Atheists put upon it. It is not a *power* at all, but only a name for our ignorance of causation. If *mind* is required to interpret the universe, it seems probable that mind was also required to construct or mould it; and the fact that

The Personality of God

this mind vastly transcends ours does not prove that it is not mind of *some* sort. All our philosophical and religious expressions and theories are confessedly provisional; but their being of this nature does not prove that they are valueless. Crutches are useful for weak people. The creeds of rational Theists are symbols, and not precise and exhaustive statements of facts of natural history. Atheists bluster when they are cross-examining Theists, but they themselves appear utterly fatuous when they are searchingly cross-examined.

If God has nothing *at all akin* to what we call personality, He can have no moral qualities at all, and He cannot be love. And so, as Browning declared, He would be essentially inferior to many of His creatures. Surely this is a *reductio ad absurdum* of those theories which deny personality to the Creator. *How* can God give us what He does not possess Himself? Has the First Cause intelligence enough to be surprised and startled at its own productions? *Whence* came purpose into the universe if there was originally none in it? How came an idiot to beget a sage? *What* is

The Personality of God

it that determines that things shall exist in one way, and not in another? If the universe is mad, how comes it that *we* are sane? Granting that matter and force are eternal, we still inquire what is it that moulds and directs them. There is no such thing as chance, and, if there is no chance, one thinks that there *must* be purpose, and purpose implies mind of some sort, and mind implies something akin to personality.

Matthew Arnold seemed to suppose that, if they really believed in God, Theists were bound to explain to him *just how* God exists. But, of course, that supposition is absurd. Probably God knows how to exist in very many ways neither sanctioned nor understood by Matthew Arnold. In postulating God's existence and personality, we do not profess to explain all difficulties. We only say that, in doing this, our reason is following the line of *least* resistance. With regard to such insoluble problems, it will meet with *some* resistance in whatsoever direction it may move. We *must* be content with probability and provisional knowledge, since certainty and satisfying and accurate

The Personality of God

knowledge are for us at present impossible. Twilight is better than utter darkness. To "see men as trees walking" is better than to be totally blind, and it is a prophecy of the gradual coming of clearer and more adequate vision. We must not throw away our flickering lamp, merely because its light is unable to penetrate into dense forests around us.

The great merit of rational Theism is that it does not ignore or turn away from *any* ascertained and important facts, whilst Atheism, Pantheism, and utter Agnosticism all more or less ignore some profoundly significant facts of our higher life. They are all obliged to give the lie, to some extent, to our conscience and to our spiritual nature as a whole.

Broad, patient, and reflective Theism is, in our age, a veritable cave Adullam, into which are gathered "everyone that is in distress, and everyone that is discontented," every fragment of truth at present unduly ignored by precipitate men of science, in their wish to emphasize other truths, or to build an entirely symmetrical temple of know-

The Personality of God

ledge. Here are gathered together the outcast forms of "unclothed" truths, wandering between two worlds, the world of established facts, and the ideal world of poetry and imagination, where dwell the seminal principles of a profounder faith and a loftier knowledge. Religion of the wiser sort alone gathers up the lessons of the past, and gazes onwards to the dimly-gleaming phantom forms of undiscovered or unclassified verities as yet inconceivable to us. Perhaps the best religion, like God, is patient, because it feels itself to be eternal. Atheism and dogmatism are both the result of unwise precipitation of judgment.

The French philosopher, Victor Cousin, has expressed very clearly the teaching of what we may call a *Christian*, patient, and onward-looking philosophy, at once full of faith and tinged with reasonable Agnosticism. He wrote thus: "Elsewhere we have established in some manner at once the comprehensibility and the incomprehensibility of God. . . . God, as the cause of the universe, reveals Himself to us; but God is not only the cause of the universe; He is also the perfect and

The Personality of God

infinite cause, possessing in Himself, not a relative perfection which is only a degree of imperfection, but an absolute perfection, an infinitude which is not only the finite multiplied by itself in those proportions which the human mind is able always to enumerate, but a true infinitude, that is, the absolute negation of all limits in all the powers of His being. Moreover, it is not true that an *indefinite* effect adequately expresses an *infinite* cause. Hence it is not true that we are able absolutely to comprehend God by the world and by man; for *all* of God is not in them. . . . There remains, then, in God, beyond the universe and man, something unknown, impenetrable, incomprehensible. Hence, in the immeasurable spaces of the universe, and beneath all the profundities of the human soul, God escapes us in His inexhaustible infinitude, whence He is able to draw without limit new worlds, new beings, new manifestations. It is, therefore, an equal error to call God absolutely comprehensible and absolutely incomprehensible. He is both invisible and present, revealed and withdrawn in Himself, in the world and out of the world, so familiar and intimate with His creatures that

The Personality of God

we see Him by opening our eyes, that we feel Him in feeling our hearts beat, and at the same time inaccessible in His impenetrable majesty; mingled with everything, and separated from everything, manifesting Himself in universal life, and causing scarcely an ephemeral shadow of His eternal essence to appear there; communicating Himself without cessation, and remaining incommunicable; at once the living God and the God concealed, 'Deus vivus et Deus absconditus.'"

This teaching of the brilliant French thinker is in full harmony with that of the veteran philosopher, James Martineau, who declared that "All our beliefs and speech concerning God are untrue, and yet infinitely truer than any non-belief and silence." A child's conception of the inner nature of his father's mind is necessarily erroneous in many ways, but it has a real *provisional* value, and is far better than no conception of any sort. Diluted truth is not the same thing as complete ignorance. The divine ideas suffice to guide us practically, though they *cannot* become incarnate in our present humanity without losing much of their coherent absoluteness. We can *experi-*

The Personality of God

ence a little of the Infinite, whilst utterly powerless to define it adequately. We cannot know God in His essence; but we *have* good reason for believing that He "is *greater* than our hearts, and knoweth all things."

TOLSTOY'S MELANCHOLY AND
HOPEFULNESS

III

IN some ways it may seem strange that there was in Tolstoy such profound melancholy combined with such robust hopefulness. But the truth is that he was pessimistic as to the *actual* state of the world and almost optimistic as to its coming deliverance. So long as men lived as they do at present, he thought that great and wide-spread misery was inevitable, but when they came to act according to the precepts of Jesus, human life would be comparatively happy. The greater part of human wretchedness Tolstoy thought to be avoidable. His view on this matter was like that of St Paul when he spoke of "this present evil world."

Yet, though human life might be made comparatively happy, Tolstoy considered that it could never in this world be *entirely* satisfactory. It must always be a more or less sorrowful pil-

Tolstoy's Melancholy

grimace. Man's true citizenship is in the heavens. In order that each man might be really and adequately happy, Tolstoy thought that it was necessary that others should love him better than they loved themselves, and this is impossible.

The sympathetic and benevolent life, as conceived by Tolstoy, inevitably has great griefs, but it has also great consolations. Moral Idealism at once depresses us, and by its fine suggestiveness inspires ultimate hopefulness. The very fact that the soul is profoundly discontented seems to indicate that it is born for a loftier world. Thus, as the Bible teaches, "we are saved by hope."

But, at the very bottom of Tolstoy's spirit, there was ever brooding the deep sadness of the baffled and aspiring mystic. Human life must on earth for ever remain tantalizing and fundamentally unsatisfying. It could never satisfy men's hunger and thirst for the infinite and the perfect. The trail of the finite is over it all. Deep spirits are often more vexed and cast down by the finiteness and grievous limitations of man's present existence than by its sins or its sorrows. To them, as to

and Hopefulness

Emerson, it often seems that the only sin is limitation. The pettiness of man seems to mar all his goodness. The necessitated selfishness, the instability, and the fickleness of the human race drive the deeper souls to despair. They seem to deprive life of all really serious *meaning*. Considered as *an end in itself*, earthly existence can never be worth having.

Like all real mystics, Tolstoy thought that, without God, science and philosophy can never truly minister adequately to our wants. He would have sympathized with St Augustine when he declared concerning the books of the philosophers: "These, O Lord, were the dishes in which they brought to me being hungry the sun and the moon instead of Thee."

All the best mystics wish, in a certain sense, to "cease from man," but not in the Calvinistic sense. They regard human nature as unsatisfying rather than as innately vile. They wish to cease from the *actual* man, in order that they may in some measure find the *ideal* man. In their view, ordinary human nature is a kind of dame's school for infantine spirits. And, in its higher phases,

Tolstoy's Melancholy

that nature suggests rather than truly or adequately reveals God. The nobler faculties of man are only *in the making* here on earth. They all of them are ready to cry with St John: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Ardent moral idealists such as Tolstoy are saved from despair only by remembering, as St Paul did, that "the creation was made subject to vanity not willingly."

In a spiritual sense Tolstoy had really profound affinity with the philosopher, Malebranche. He held that we must see all things in God if we are to understand them thoroughly. Like Browning, the Russian mystic held that all man's highest faculties have a tendency to God, that in some dim, instinctive way, they are partially aware that God is their only real refuge. In order to know ourselves adequately, we must in some measure know God. The divine nature partly understood is needed as a kind of "Interpreter's House" by human nature in its prolonged spiritual pilgrimage. All man's grandest powers instinctively exclaim, "Our life is hid with Christ in God."

Tolstoy thought that, in one sense, we must "cease from man," in order that we may learn to

and Hopefulness

understand him thoroughly. He considered that "the proper study of mankind is man" only so far as preparatory or introductory knowledge is concerned. Man is not self-interpreting. Whilst his feet are on the earth, his head is in the clouds. The best tendencies of human nature can only be genuinely comprehended when they are seen to culminate in the divine nature. In a very real sense, we do see all things in God, at least all the things that are most worth seeing. Man can never be his own veritable self till he is "made partaker of the divine nature."

And so it comes to pass that real and devout mysticism is both sorrowful and always rejoicing. Unlike Calvinism, it believes firmly in the immense suggestiveness of man's nature. But it also believes that, whilst absent from God, it is necessarily "sore let and hindered" in its pilgrimage towards spiritual nobleness. Like other inchoate and undeveloped things, our highest nature must necessarily often appear almost meaningless. Its true significance is to be looked for in its latest stages, when it shall be at home in God, when "this corruptible shall have put on incorruption."

Melancholy and Hopefulness

And so, in this world, abiding sorrow and dissatisfaction must always be mingled with the hopefulness of the real mystic. Whilst we are present in the body, we must always be, to a great extent, "absent from the Lord." It is only in our rare hours of free communion with the divine mind that we can understand and appreciate ourselves. Great souls like that of Tolstoy must always thirst for God during their earthly life. They can never be contented here on earth. Their lofty discontent does not arise from real contempt for the best qualities of human nature. Rather, it arises from a keen appreciation of their potential glory. The full meaning of heroism, fidelity, self-sacrifice, and love will only then be revealed to us, when at last we are permitted to gaze upon them in their very highest development in the free moral splendour of God. Then only shall we know ourselves, when we are permitted to know God.

TOLSTOY'S VIEWS ON ART

IV

TOLSTOY'S ideas about art, though containing much that is noble and true, will always seem to the majority of educated and reflecting people rather one-sided and exaggerated, even after reading the excellent explanation of them given us by Mr Aylmer Maude, an ardent disciple of the great Russian teacher.

Tolstoy declared that " Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of certain external signs, hands on to others feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings, and also experience them." And he considered that the more infectious or contagious art was, the better it also was. Art, viewed merely as art, has, confessedly, nothing to do with morality; but Tolstoy considered that *good* art must be *universal* in its ap-

Tolstoy's Views on Art

peal, and not in any way exclusive. He thought that the art which was unintelligible to a great number of people could not possibly be of a really high and good kind. His idea that art is far more closely connected with emotion than with thought is manifestly true.

The main objection to Tolstoy's teaching about Art is that he wishes to make it too exclusively moral and social. The Russian reformer was at once a morality-intoxicated man, a religion-intoxicated man, and a democracy-intoxicated man. He had too little appreciation of purely intellectual beauty. His comparatively late conversion made him a little too austere. In his later years the moral element exercised a too despotic and exclusive sway. It was not tempered, as it was in James Martineau, by a real love of philosophy for its own sake. The Russian prophet was never really a philosopher. Mr Aylmer Maude shows us this when he tells us that Tolstoy was highly satisfied with Matthew Arnold's shallow and unphilosophical religious books.

Tolstoy's flat denial that *beauty* can be a criterion of art, because men have such different notions of

Tolstoy's Views on Art

it, needs considerable qualification. Taking the world collectively, we might almost say that men's notions of moral nobleness or goodness are as various and discrepant as their ideas of beauty are. Both Tolstoy and Martineau attributed to the deliverances of conscience a steadfast clearness, decisiveness, and oracular authority which, in many cases, are not really found in them.

Since we have no definite and universally recognized idea of beauty, it is true that we cannot apply it as a criterion to art as an *exact and adequate* test, but we may yet legitimately use it as an approximate, provisional, partial, and to some extent useful test, in much the same way that we apply our conceptions of right and wrong to ethical problems. The demand of the Russian moralist that the finest art must be *universal* in its appeal, and in no way exclusive, seems decidedly erroneous in some ways, as also does his idea that it must always be distinctly moral. The best Greek sculpture and architecture were neither moral nor immoral. They were chiefly a kind of glorification of symmetry. Music does not preach to us directly concerning our ethical and social life, and

Tolstoy's Views on Art

so, in his very undue depreciation of it, the austere Russian called it "the most refined lust of the senses." To most men it will seem that Cardinal Newman gave us a far truer description of the functions of music in his famous eulogy of it. The finest music is far removed from anything like lust. It is as the voice of the corruptible already putting on incorruption, and of the mortal already putting on immortality. It is our nearest approach to the one language of the immortals.

The idea that art cannot be of the highest kind, unless it appeals at once to the whole human race, is gravely misleading. The uneducated can only learn very gradually to understand and appreciate a good deal of the finest art. Reaction from the æsthetic pride of Nietzsche should not make us set up the commonplace as an idol. Very often the best service that true art can do for the people is to convince them of their ignorance, vulgarity, and bad taste, as old Socrates convicted his Athenian hearers of intellectual ignorance.

Art must not be "rightous over-much," lest it in great measure destroy itself. Divines make

Tolstoy's Views on Art

a great mistake when they represent God as an exclusively ethical being. All beauty and all intellectual splendour are reflections of the nature of God. Many souls are best led to moral goodness *indirectly*, some by beauty, some by intellect, some by heroism, and some by love of the sublime. Rigidly and exclusively ethical instruction often repels many souls and nauseates them by monotony.

In the present state of the education of the world, art cannot be quite so democratic as Tolstoy wished it to be. For a time it must treat the uneducated as children, and not as men. It legitimately seeks to refine mankind as well as to purify it morally. It does not believe that the *vox populi*, in its present uneducated condition, is entirely coincident with the *vox Dei*. The best art is more genuinely Catholic in its tastes than Tolstoy was. It strives to *give* men the power of appreciating many things which as yet they do not understand or value. Would the Russian moralist say that Plato's glorious Dialogues are not true or fine art, merely because their appeal is at present to the few rather than to the many? Are the more intel-

Tolstoy's Views on Art

lectual portions of Shelley's poems inartistic, because they are unintelligible to the uneducated? Was the art of Tennyson, Browning, and George Meredith of an inferior kind, merely because it makes scarcely any real appeal to the followers of the Salvation Army? Some of the very finest things in man are at present the rarest. Jesus Christ declared that He had many things to say to His disciples which they could not bear or understand then. Suppose that some extraordinarily congenial mind had understood and appreciated those deeper thoughts of Christ and had expressed them in a noble poem, ought men to have declared that the poem was not true or fine art, merely because it soared above the thoughts of the commonplace? The deepest souls almost always are in some sense incomprehensible to inferior souls. Precocious souls are often despised and rejected of men. Commonplace people often persecute and slay the Prophets, instead of appreciating them. Idealists are in many ways strangers upon earth; one part of their brains is already in the stars.

Suppose that some great painter had lived in the days of St Augustine, and suppose that he had

Tolstoy's Views on Art

managed, by extraordinary sympathy and skill, to portray on canvas the rare, profound, and God-haunted emotions of that baffled pilgrim of the spiritual world, would the critics of those days have been justified in declaring that that marvellous picture was not fine art, because its appeal necessarily was to the few rather than to the many?

Art, as conceived by Tolstoy, seems to be at once too heedlessly democratic, in some sense too sectarian or narrow, and too much given to preaching. Its method of having compassion on the multitude is not altogether wise. Whilst eagerly ministering to its present developed wants, it tends to forget its undeveloped and rarer potentialities. It thinks to minister to the commonplace too exclusively by becoming almost commonplace itself. It misinterprets the real meaning of St Paul's wish to become all things to all men. It reminds one of those unwise religious teachers who, in our public worship, would have us confine ourselves to those hymns which appeal *at once* to the very dumbest and most unimaginative people in a church. Those teachers forget that it does ordinary men *good* to have their unexercised and well-nigh dormant

Tolstoy's Views on Art

spiritual faculties stretched to the utmost possible extent. They ignore the truth that, in this way, it sometimes comes to pass that the great Elijah casts his mantle over the humbler Elisha. The sublime is often highly infectious.

Tolstoy was one of the most candid and open-minded of men. So it is likely enough that he would have admitted the validity of some portion of the criticism here offered; for it is not *entirely* inconsistent with his own views as to the functions of art. He might well have admitted that he had spoken rather too precipitately and unguardedly on this subject. And we, on our part, should be quite willing to meet him half-way in seeking a reconciliation of our apparently conflicting views of art.

We cordially agree with him in thinking that art must not degenerate into mere *prettiness*. Art must have a soul. It must be a missionary, though not a sectarian one. No true artist ought to despise the people or to be content to keep them in ignorance. The best artist ought to look forward to a brighter future for the people, even as the Hebrew prophet looked forward to a coming day

Tolstoy's Views on Art

when even the humblest souls should know the Lord *personally*, and no longer have to depend on the teaching of others. True artists ought to cherish some of that hopefulness for the people which made Shelley declare:

“Yet every heart contains perfection's germ.”

Meanwhile the truest kindness to the ignorant and the commonplace is not to set them upon a throne as judges, but to sympathize with them in their privations, to encourage them, and to lead them on to a loftier point of view. A true friend of the people must not be a flatterer of the people. He must seek to baptize them into the kingdom of the sublime as well as into the kingdoms of righteousness and love. There is nothing supercilious or unfriendly in the Pauline warning, “Neglect not the gift that is in thee,” even though the gift be as yet an unrecognized and undeveloped one.

After all, thinking people must own that there is a good deal of much-needed wisdom in Tolstoy's teaching about art. In a sense, the Bible is right in declaring that “that is the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”

Tolstoy's Views on Art

All really great souls have some measure of the heart of democracy in them. Their deepest appeal ever is to man *as man*, to the fundamental and unalterable instincts, feelings, and aspirations of our race. The literature that really lives and exercises an abiding sway over our race springs from the universal heart, and is the voice of those who are in some sense universal men. The art of Shakespeare is immeasurably greater and nobler than the art of men of the school of Pater. The magnificently human and universal heart of some of the old Hebrew prophets still thrills the inmost souls of thousands. One touch of genuine human nature makes the whole world kin. Fastidious correctness is soon forgotten; but bursts of great hearts are a possession for ever. David's laments over Saul and Jonathan and Absalom are as fresh and potent as when they were first written. The deep and clinging human love which made Samuel still mourn for Saul, even when God had rejected him, still speaks to our hearts with an abiding force of constraining sweetness and glory. The law-defying affection of Antigone for her brother is not forgotten. Across the gulf of untold ages

Tolstoy's Views on Art

old Homer still vividly portrays for us the unchanging heart of human love in his immortal scene of the parting of Hector and Andromache.

The Infinite often seems to choose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. Many Greek legends or stories survive, whilst many Greek philosophies are forgotten. The best kind of art must plant its feet firmly on the broad homely earth of primal human instincts and feelings, though its head may be in the far-off stars of God. When art degenerates into pedantic and exclusive Pharisaism, when, in its inhuman pride, it declares that the people are accursed and worthless, when it separates itself from the great vine of collective humanity, and seeks to live as an entirely independent branch, it soon loses its vital sap; and, even though it should gain the whole world of knowledge and of formal symmetry, it would in the end inevitably find that it had lost its own soul.

THE END

EDINBURGH
COLSTONS LIMITED
PRINTERS

CENTRAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
University of California, San Diego

DATE DUE

JUN 21 1979	
JUN 14 1979	
APR 07 1982	
MAR 30 1982	
JUN 11 1982	
MAY 11 1982	
JUL 01 1983	
JUN 24 1983	
APR 24 1987	
APR 26 1987	
SENT	
APR 27 1987	
TO REPAIR ACQ. DEPT.	
MAY 18 1987	
MAR 25 1988	
MAR 24 1988	

CI 39

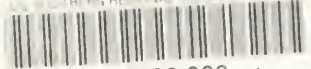
UCSD Libr.

University of California
SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
405 Hilgard Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90024-1388
Return this material to the library
from which it was borrowed.

MAR 28 2005
REC'D YRL MAR 28 2005

REC'D YRL SEP 1 2005

LEWIS & CLARK, HE... A... RARY FAC... TY



AA 000 338 360 1

a

Uni

S